THEORETICAL AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

MARXISM TODAY

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MARXISM TODAY

THEORETICAL AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

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50 Years of the Communist Party

John Gollan

Text of the Report made to the Executive Committee C.P.G.B. Sept. 12th, 1970.

On July 31st-August 1st, 1920—the Communist Unity Convention was held in London, and the Communist Party of Great Britain founded. The two main British Marxist organisations—the British Socialist Party and the main sections of the Socialist Labour Party—joined together with other militant groups and organisations to form a single revolutionary Marxist Party.

The Workers' Socialist Federation and other revolutionaries, including a Scottish group and a section of shop stewards, joined the Communist Party at its Second Congress of Unity held at Leeds at the end of January, 1921. In March of the same year, a group of the Left Wing of the Independent Labour Party came into the new Party.

The Young Communist League was established early in October 1921.

The formation of the Communist Party, arising out of British experience, was not a split away from existing Labour organisations. Rather it was the coming together of a number of separate revolutionary groups.

"It is not a split", wrote the *Daily Herald*, then a militant journal, commenting on the first Unity Convention, "it is indeed a fusion. But it is more than that. It is the creation of an organisation for the expression in action of a definite and existant body of revolutionary thought . . . They are preparing to face the problem which too many of us are inclined temporarily to evade—the problem of 'how' and 'now' of the British revolution".

Why Was it Needed?

When the Communist Party was founded, the British Labour movement, one of the oldest in the world, had already known more than 150 years of continuous struggle. There were long traditions of working-class organisation.

But, as Marx and Engels, living in Britain, had found, and Lenin so clearly explained, the fact that Britain by the middle of the 19th Century had become the workshop of the world, and the development of British imperialism, then the very centre of world imperialism, had a deep effect on our Labour movement.

Chartism died away. Whilst the daily struggle in defence of working class conditions continued, first a general opportunism, an acceptance of "the system", a sense of "the partnership of Capital and Labour", and later, with imperialism, the outlook of reformism, came to dominate the mass Labour organisations.

And when, in the 1880s, the first British Marxist organisations were formed, they found themselves surrounded as it were by a sea of reformism, at first somewhat isolated, carrying out a difficult battle to win the Labour movement to a scientific socialist outlook.

By 1900, and especially on the eve of World War I, a major contradiction was apparent. On the one hand there were great mass organisations —trade unions, co-operatives, and later on the Labour Party—potentially of vast strength but lacking in socialist ideas and perspective, whilst, on the other, there were small, courageous militant Marxist and semi-Marxist groupings, divided amongst themselves, and largely, but not entirely, lacking support from the mass Labour movement.

Three Great Events

Three great sequences of events brought to the fore the need for a revolutionary Party in Britain.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the mass trade union struggles of the previous years, known as "the Labour Unrest" quickly melted away. Despite heroic opposition to the war led by Marxists, and the great shop stewards' struggles, there was no real organised national struggle against the war.

Workers within the different Marxist and militant groups began to feel this lack and the need for something new.

Then came the October Revolution of 1917, and whilst right-wing Labour leaders mainly joined in the anti-Soviet clamour, militant British workers rallied to the Revolution's support. Even more, they started to ask themselves, especially as Lenin's works began to be translated, what was the particular character of this Bolshevik Party which had made the first socialist break-through in world capitalism.

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Then came the stormy post-war years. A short boom was followed by a devastating slump, wage cuts and the dole. Revolution was in the air—in Germany and Hungary, national revolution in China, in India, Egypt and various other parts of the world. In March 1919 the Communist International was founded.

Now it seemed clear to more and more militant British workers—members of Marxist groups, shop stewards, opponents of the war, left-wingers of the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party—that they *must unite* their efforts, hammer out a common revolutionary strategy, make use of their political strength, play their part in the great international revolutionary struggle in which Lenin and the Bolsheviks had set the pace.

Negotiations began, prolonged and difficult, and the Communist Party was founded.

Role of the Communist Party

What was the essential role, what were the main tasks that faced this new revolutionary party?

Life had shown, firstly, that no amount of experience, suffering, nor even struggle, would *by themselves,* spontaneously, bring to the working class and their allies a *socialist* outlook and consciousness. All the more was this true in a country so long the centre of imperialism, with so experienced a ruling class, armed with all the weapons of state and control of the means of education and information.

It was becoming clear, at least to the founders of the Party, that if the working class and its allies were to defeat capitalism and go forward to a socialist Britain, they needed a Party with a scientific socialist theory, based on Marxism-Leninism, which could apply its general theoretical understanding to the particular problems of the British revolution, and give a socialist perspective to the British people.

One hundred and fifty years of continuous struggle has shown the British working class the importance of developing strong mass organisations—trade unions, co-operatives, organisations for peace and liberty, organisations of women and youth—and had brought them to form the Labour Party at the turn of the century. But it was beginning to become clear, at least to the vanguard, that these organisations were not in themselves sufficient, that a revolutionary Party was needed from among the active members of these organisations, a Party that could help to co-ordinate and guide all the various streams of mass struggle, lift up step by step the level of the struggle, show the connections between the immediate battles and the struggle for socialism.

Experience, thirdly, was beginning to indicate to the more militant workers that this new sort of Party, revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist Party, would need a new type of revolutionary organisation, close to the working people, democratic and disciplined.

Experience, last but not least the shattering experience of the break-up of the Second International on the outbreak of war, showed that a Party was needed with a genuinely internationalist outlook, imbued with international working class solidarity, that could play its part in the new world revolutionary movement then emerging under the aegis of the Communist International.

A new sort of Party was needed, in Lenin's words in his letter to Tom Bell: "a very good, really proletarian, really mass Communist Party".

Not Easy

Of course it could not be said that the founders of the Party, individually or collectively, could see with clarity all the different aspects of the role that it would have to play.

Nor was it easy to take the revolutionary road in a country like Britain, so long the centre of imperialism, where reformist ideas weighed so heavily on the minds of the working people.

But one thing was clear to them, and in this they were unreservedly correct—without a revolutionary party, based on Marxist-Leninism, with deep links with the mass of the people, above all the working class, without such a party which could systematically win a leading role amongst the people, *socialism could not be achieved in Britain.*

A Proud Record

This is our 50th Anniversary, and we are celebrating fifty years of struggle against capitalism, fifty years of unbroken service in the interests of the working people, in which we trained and developed thousands of able working class leaders in all spheres.

The Party was hardly born when it was plunged into bitter struggle to stop intervention against the Soviet Union, and was amongst the initiators of the Councils of Action which swiftly halted that particular threat of war. Soon it was heavily engaged in the effort to "stop the retreat" before the employers' offensive on living conditions.

From the start it accepted its internationalist responsibility to help the peoples of the British Empire to struggle for independence and to help them form their first trade unions and Communist Parties. In 1925, the Communist Party took the initiative in the "Hands Off China" movement.

It was the Party, along with the Minority Movement in which it played a leading part, that con-

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Welsh contingent on the hunger march to London, 1932

tinuously fought to achieve a militant and united trade union movement.

At the time of mass unemployment, it was the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, led by the Party, with its great Hunger Marches and demonstrations which transformed the masses of the unemployed into one of the most militant sections of the Labour movement.

The prelude to the General Strike saw the small Communist Party, almost alone alongside the Miners, warning the working class of what was to come, and the Strike itself saw the Communists in the front ranks of the Councils of Action, resisting the shameful capitulation of the T.U.C. and doing their all to enlist support for the miners.

There are more of us who can remember with pride the struggles of the 'thirties, and our Party's role in the fight against war and against fascism at home and abroad, of Cable Street and the resistance to Mosley, of the constant efforts of the Party to bring about the unity of the working class, and of the people, including students and intellectuals around the working class.

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We recall above all the heroic struggle in Spain and of our part in the struggle for medical aid, against the mockery of non-intervention, of the role of the Party and the Young Communist League in the formation of the British contingent of the International Brigade, and of those who fell. We recall, too, the struggle against the shameful betrayal of 'Munich', and remember with pride how the lone Communist M.P. denounced from the tribune of Parliament the treacherous betrayal of Czechoslovakia.

We campaigned for collective security against fascism and for the joint action with the Soviet Union which could have prevented the Second World War.

There are differences on the estimate of the nature of the war made by the Party in 1939. But our Party never ceased to struggle against fascism and the Men of Munich in Britain.

It played a leading role in the campaign for the Second Front, for the unity of the anti-fascist forces, and for the strengthening of working class organisation during the war.

The war ended. Once again it was 'into action' on the home front. We helped with the squatters, fought against the wage freeze and exposed the incomes policy and threat to the trade union movement, and against Order 1305.

The Party pioneered the organisation of the unorganised, helped to speed trade union amalgamation and develop the shop stewards movement and workshop organisation, and our Party played a leading part in the defeat of the Wilson Government's anti-trade union legislation.

While we supported anything progressive done by the two post-war Labour Governments, we warned that the general policies, far from leading to socialism, would result in Tory Governments.

Above all, in the last few years the Party promoted the alternative left programme, ceaselessly strove for left unity, and played a leading part in developing the swing to the left in the trade union and Labour movement, which is of major importance today.

Following the defeat of Hitler, new countries took the socialist road. The Chinese Revolution was victorious. The national liberation movements spread. The balance of class forces in the world was radically changed.

But reaction was not idle. The Second World War had hardly ended when, led by American imperialism (supported by Britain), the cold war was launched in a hundred forms.

Along with militant trade unionists, left forces within the Labour Party, important sections of the youth, the Communist Party fought back—to defeat the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, against N.A.T.O., S.E.A.T.O., and the Common Market. We campaigned against German rearmament, for the recognition of the German Democratic Republic, for the end to American intervention against the Chinese People's Republic and for China's international rights, and against British production of nuclear weapons and American bases on British soil. We exposed neocolonialism, campaigned against the barbarous wars in Malaya and in Korea, and the imperialist aggression against Vietnam. We fought for solidarity with the revolution in Cuba, against apartheid, against racialism, and in solidarity with the peoples of Africa.

All this contributed to the new hopeful elements now emerging in the international scene.

For a Socialist Consciousness

Throughout these fifty years we have ceaselessly worked for an understanding of socialism in the movement. Reformism has played an immense and deadening role on British Labour.

Recalling our history, we salute those who wrote and edited, spoke and lectured. We think of our first weekly papers, *The Communist*, the *Workers' Weekly* and *Workers' Life*, and *Challenge*. Above all, this year we celebrated the forty fighting years of the *Daily Worker* and the *Morning Star* which could not have existed without the Communist Party and the devoted support and sacrifices of its members as well as those of non-Communists, and which is indispensable in the fight for the Socialist Revolution.

We think of journals like *Communist Review*, *Labour Monthly*, *Modern Quarterly*, *Marxism Today*, of *World News and Views* (once *Inprecorr*) and now *Comment*, of our books and publishing house, *Lawrence & Wishart*, of our thousands and thousands of pamphlets, leaflets and folders, and of those who sold them, who at all times and in all weathers found the means to take them to the people.

Today many people speak of Marxism. Hundreds of thousands of people, particularly amongst the youth, are turning with the greatest interest to Marxism-Leninism.

Those who were with us in the 'Twenties and the 'Thirties will remember that this was not always so. It was members of our Party who pioneered the application of Marxism to the main branches of knowledge—political economy, history in general and the history of the Labour movement, problems of art, literature and aesthetics, philosophy, science, education, and the theoretical as well as the practical problems of the struggle against Imperialism and Colonialism.

A Strategy of Struggle

When our Communisty Party was first founded we set our sights clearly to the need for a Socialist

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Britain. We considered it as one of our main tasks to point not just to the waging of immediate struggles, nor just to outline a glorious perspective of socialism, but to elaborate a general strategy of socialist revolution.

In the 'Twenties our Party contributed towards the elaboration of a general programme of the Communist International. Looking back, it may be that we tended then to put forward our strategy in too generalised terms.

In the 'Thirties much work was done by our Party on the study of the specific nature of British imperialism, of the British State and other institutions, on the particular characteristics of the British Labour movement, and our strategy started to be more specific.

It was after the victory over fascism and the end of World War II in the totally new relation of world class forces, when many countries were finding new roads to socialism, that, in 1951, we first elaborated our long-term programme, our general strategy for the advance to socialism in Britain—*The British Road to Socialism*. Three times (1952, 1957 and 1967) we discussed this programme throughout the Party, and ensuing Party Congresses amended it.

We seek in our programme to apply the general laws of advance to socialism, elaborated by Marx, Engels and Lenin, and in the course of the experience of the international working class movement, to the particular conditions of Britain.

We seek to take into account the specific characteristics of British capitalism, its economy, its state, parliament and other institutions, its class structure, along with the specific characteristics—traditions of struggle, forms of organisation—of the British Labour and progressive movement, and of the long struggle for democracy.

With our programme we put our views of a correct strategy for the socialist revolution and building of socialism in Britain, our conception of the leading role of the working class, of the need for a broad alliance of working people around the working class, of the relations between the immediate struggle and the struggle for political power in Britain, of the combination of the mass struggle outside Parliament with Parliamentary struggle, of relations of the Communist Party with the Labour Party and mass organisations, of the solution of the national problem in Britain, of the tasks of a British socialist government and the forms of what scientific socialists call the dictatorship of the proletariat, the rule of the working people, led by the working class, could take in Britain.

We make it quite clear in our proposals that we do not consider that socialism can be won without a socialist revolution, the winning by the working people of political power, without continuous—at times bitter—mass class struggle in the most diverse forms, but we indicate that, in our opinion, it will be possible to win power by a combination of struggle outside and inside Parliament, without an armed insurrection, and it is for this that we aim.

We express our view that a socialist government must, by socialist nationalisation, planning and other measures, carry through a radical economic transformation of Britain; that it should maintain all the gains made by the working people in 200 years of struggle for democracy, but that at the same time, in the context of a developing socialist economy, socialist state and democratic control by the working people of the organs of education and information, it should open up the development of a truly socialist democracy, which will be a great qualitative advance over the best of democracy won by the people's struggle under capitalism.

Our programme—*The British Road to Socialism*—is based on the conception that capitalism will be ended and Socialism built in our country only by the combined action of the working people led by their Socialist and democratic organisations. It emphasises that the Communist Party does not aim at any exclusive position of leadership in this struggle. At the same time we do not think that Socialism can be won without the continuous strengthening of the Communist Party and its success in winning a leading role amongst the working people.

We point out the overwhelming importance, throughout the whole process of advance to socialism, of winning the unity of the working class and of the working people around the working class.

We never conceal that the struggle for socialism in Britain will be prolonged, hard and complex. We have made it clear, whilst we still struggle for the peaceful development of the British revolution, which we believe is possible, that if the imperialists should seek by violent means to block the struggle or by violence to defy the democratic decisions of a socialist government and socialist parliament, then that democratically elected government backed by the working class and people will be ready to take whatever steps may be necessary, including counter violence, to defend the advance to socialism.

Internationalism

Proletarian internationalism, the conception of international working class solidarity, has always been at the heart of our Party's theory and practice.

As we have said, amongst our founders were those who had been initiators of the "Hands Off

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Russia" movement. We always, and we are proud of it, fought to defend the young Soviet Republic against intervention, slander and deceit.

I know that we can be reproached that at times we have defended things in the U.S.S.R. that, only later, we came to know were indefensible; that we were ignorant at the time of practices that, under Stalin, were utterly alien to socialism. We accept this criticism.

We are proud of our recognition (and we were in this country often alone) of the world historic significance of the October Revolution, of our defence of the Soviet Union when almost all others were viciously attacking and slandering it, of our efforts to explain to the world the pioneer role that the U.S.S.R. played and is playing in the building of socialism and communism, in the defeat of fascism, in leading the world struggle against imperialism, in fighting for peace, and in making possible the achievement of the prevention of a third world war. We shall continue to defend this role of the Soviet Union and the socialist world, while continuing in a fraternal way to make known any differences we may have with the actions and attitudes of the Soviet Union or other socialist countries.

We were founded as a revolutionary Party in what was once the centre of imperialism. From the first, we accepted our responsibility of solidarity with the peoples of the former British Empire in their fight for liberation, against colonialism, and later neo-colonialism, and also of solidarity with the national liberation movements throughout the world.

We have worked in solidarity with the Communist and Workers' parties of Europe.

On the formation of our Party we became members of the Communist International, and we participated in all the great recent gatherings of the Workers' and Communist Parties of the world (1957, 1960 and 1969). The Communist International was dissolved in 1943 because the growing maturity of the Parties and the variety of conditions under which they worked, made one centre no longer necessary or desirable. It was replaced by the voluntary co-operation of the independent Communist Parties.

With the complex, many-sided development of the international Communist movement, we recognise that there are some deep differences between a number of socialist countries and also between a number of Communist Parties.

We stand for the development of the greatest possible unity in the world struggle against imperialism, for the most consistent and patient efforts to overcome differences, for the practice of fraternal discussion of points of difference as comrades within the world family of Communist and Workers' Parties. For the Communist Parties are the only truly international political force in the world today existing in 105 countries, in all five continents.

It is our view that each Communist Party must enjoy autonomy, must freely develop its own policy and programme, must enjoy in this autonomy the respect of other Communist and Workers' Parties.

But we recognise and deeply feel that without the practice of proletarian internationalism (giving and receiving) no country will successfully advance to socialism, that the practice of international working class solidarity is the duty of every Communist Party.

Mistakes

I have spoken with some pride concerning the achievements of our Party during the past 50 years.

I know very well that in the course of our history we have had many failures; made many mistakes.

In a country like Britain, where a reformist outlook has so long dominated the mass Labour movement, where the bourgeoisie is very experienced, and know not only how to make brutal open attacks but cunningly to cajole and bribe, to embrace and absorb, there are constant temptations for leaders and members of a revolutionary party to be drawn into reformist acts and attitudes. There is a constant danger of what Lenin called economism, confining efforts to the immediate mass struggle, relaxing the struggle for socialist consciousness, losing the clarity of socialist objectives, belittling the significance of Marxist-Leninist theory on the role of the revolutionary party.

But equally there is a constant "temptation" of an opposite character, a constant pull towards mistakes of a leftist type.

When revolutionary workers break with imperialism and reformism, cut the links that bind them to the ruling class, begin to take the revolutionary road, there is always a danger that in taking this essential step, they separate themselves off from the mass of the workers, from their mass organisations, turn to abstract revolutionary phrases, see long-term objectives whilst refusing to examine the way to achieve them, try to jump stages, or reject alliances necessary for advance.

Whilst we should, in my opinion, avoid a too facile labelling of errors as "right" or "left" (so often right and left errors are inter-twined), we should recognise that, from the very character of our British background, there are constant "pulls" or temptations to revolutionaries to make one or other type of mistake.

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We have not felt it necessary to try and make final estimations of every act made by our Party in its long history, of every "line", every attitude. Much has been written in our "History", in articles, in Congress reports. More will be written.

But in looking at our errors and shortcomings, I think we can claim with justifiable pride that in all our fifty years, we have never capitulated to capitalism, never renounced our principles as we saw them, never ceased to wage the class struggle or to strive to raise the socialist consciousness of the British working people, nor to put before them the perspective of socialist revolution and building a socialist Britain as a part of the socialist world.

Never More Than Today

In the fifty years of our existence, we have grown—with ups and downs—from a Party of a few thousands to a Party of 30,000. We are still a small Party—too small.

It is not easy, and we do not pretend that it is, to build a revolutionary party within one of the historic centres of world imperialism.

But if we are to end capitalism, bring Britain out of its deepening crisis, make Britain a country of advanced science and technique, a country that exploits no others, that wins the respect of the people of the world, that makes use of the manifold talents and skills of its workers, technicians and intellectuals, if we are to end the deep contradictions between what is and what could be—in short, if we are to achieve a socialist Britain, *there is no other way*.

The defeat of the sixth Labour Government in the recent General Election underlines what Communists have always maintained—that a Party dominated by reformism cannot lead the people to defeat capitalism and build socialism.

Why do I insist on this again and again? Because it is a lesson that has to be understood.

Reformism rejects the theory and practice of classes and class struggle, accepts the "continuity" of foreign policy, preaches and practices the neutrality of the state, and advocates evolution by gradual reform within the framework of capitalism. Once British reformism did at least put forward a distant perspective of socialism, now the very word "socialism" has been banished, the Labour Party objective in Clause 4 buried, and there remains nothing but a vague "mixed economy", the mixture of two sorts of capitalism, and an even vaguer declaration of pragmatism which means, in fact, the surrender of the minds of the workers to capitalism and its mass media, to capitalist ideas.

In opposition, right wing Labour leaders make glowing promises. In office, again and again, consciously or unconsciously (that is not the point) they become prisoners of the very system within which they are supposed to evolve. Faced as they are bound to be, by one or another crisis, they turn to the defence of "the system", freeze wages, attack long-won liberties, counsel the workers "restraint", use the very state, which they describe as neutral, against the working class. Working people, who have supported them, become disillusioned, turn aside, or vote against. The vicious circle turns. The Tories triumphantly return.

With the abject failure of the last Labour Government, which can make no excuse of being in minority, surely it stands out more than ever *in relief that under the banner of such an outlook*, such a philosophy, there will not and cannot be advance to socialism. Indeed the disillusion engendered adds considerably to racialist and fascist threats.

But if reformism is doomed by its very nature to failure, it is no cure to leap into forms of leftism, to try to bypass the complex stages of history, to turn aside from the mass organisations of the British working class, to reject the struggle to defend and transform democracy, which in the last analysis depends on the extent of the class struggle, or to try and reach the socialist objective without, step by step, in argument and action, winning the only forces that can in fact achieve it—the working class and its allies.

I believe that it has never been clearer than today that the working people of Britain cannot advance to socialism without the Communist Party.

The whole history of the Party, its record of struggle on all major issues, of service in the Labour movement, shows the indispensable nature and role of the Communist Party.

It has consistently led the mass movement, promoted working class unity and showed that the main role of the working class struggle is the conquest of political power and socialism.

Various left movements have come and gone—the Communist Party alone has continuously functioned whatever its problems.

It has helped to develop the Labour movement in a left direction.

At various times we have received gratuitous advice to wind up and join what is called the main stream of the Labour movement. We have invariably been in the main stream. If that advice had been taken, although there was no such chance, the Labour movement would have lost the most important organised force on the left.

Today, with a Tory Government, and in the new period of sharp class confrontation opening up, the working class and the Labour movement

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John Gollan greeting a representative of Vietnam at the 1965 Congress.

need the Communist Party more than ever—and a bigger and stronger Communist Party.

There is a vast *potential* of struggle within the mass organisations of the British working class—trade unions, co-operatives—and within the Labour Party new militant trends are developing. There is a deep mood of rebellion and militancy amongst large sections of youth and students.

As a key point in our Party's strategy both for immediate struggles and the longer term development, the Party has sought to change the balance of power in the Labour movement from the right to the left, with the aim of winning a left progressive majority in the movement. Considerable progress has been made in challenging the right wing domination of the movement and in promoting the unity of all forces of the left.

But to further this process, to transform the mass organisations into forces that act in the interests of the working people and in the direction of socialism, to achieve the unity of the working class and within it of the left and most militant section, I believe that *the most important single factor* is the growth and strengthening of the Communist Party.

The militant struggles of the workers on wages and in defence of the unions, struggles to which Communists have notably contributed, are of the greatest importance. But we cannot *fundamentally* advance unless to the militancy of these immediate struggles and to the anger and rebellion of important sections of youth, is added a real and growing socialist consciousness, and it is this which the Communist Party and the Young Communist League, based on Marxism-Leninism, has continuously sought to do.

There are many and most varied streams of struggle now developing in Britain—economic, social, political, on homes, rents and pensions; on education, on peace, solidarity with the peoples of Vietnam, against racialism, against apartheid, and in defence of democracy—but it is the Communist Party which has worked to bring together these many different streams, lift their level, deepen their understanding.

The Party can do this because it is organised where the working class and people work and live, if possible in factories, pits, depots, in offices, colleges and universities, if not in areas and localities, because it combines internal democracy with voluntary discipline, has created a collective form of leadership, and accepts the responsibility for developing the potential capacities of its members.

Our Party unites genuine patriotism, genuine pride in the past achievements of the working people and deep desire to achieve with the British people a firm future, with genuine internationalism, the acceptance of the responsibility to play its part in the world struggle against imperialism and for socialism.

And so, celebrating this 50th Anniversary, we not only look back with pride on our history, with gratitude to the pioneers who founded us, and to all those many thousands who devoted their lives to building the Communist Party and the Young Communist League—but above all, we look with confidence to the present and future battles which can only end with a Socialist Britain in a Socialist World.

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50 Years Against Imperialism

Idris Cox

Long before the formation of the Communist Party in August 1920 the British working class movement had a proud record of struggle against capitalist exploitation. More than a century ago it played its part in the 1864 International Working Men's Association, though mainly in relation to trade union solidarity.

With the growth of imperialism towards the end of the 19th century came the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 (from 1906 known as the Labour Party), but in all its 70 years it made no basic analysis of imperialism. The first Fabian manifesto in 1900 (*Fabianism and the Empire*) accepted the existence of the British Empire as "a matter of fact that must be faced". The Fabian influence on official Labour policy has always ignored the common interests of the British workers with the struggle of the colonial peoples for independence and national liberation.

The Communist Party was the first and only political party in Britain which has always recognised that the struggle of British workers is inseparable from the struggle for national liberation, from the necessity of united action of all those oppressed and exploited by British imperialism.

In Britain, the centre of a vast imperialist system, the battle to win this political recognition is not an easy one. In his classic book *Imperialism*, written in 1916, Lenin emphasised the deep roots of reformism and opportunism within the British Labour movement arising from the monopoly position of Britain in the world market and the ability of imperialism to influence the higher-paid British workers and to corrupt Labour leaders with imperialist ideology.

In the discussion on the "National and Colonial Question" at the 1920 Second Congress of the Communist International it was emphasised by Tom Quelch, one of the founders of the Communist Party in Britain, that even "the rank-and-file English workers would consider it treachery to help the enslaved peoples in their revolt against British rule".

It is largely due to the consistent anti-imperialist activity of the Communist Party over the past 50 years that this attitude has changed beyond recognition, and that the Labour movement (especially during the past two decades) has been won over to a much more clear appreciation for a united struggle against imperialism.

Today, the growing struggle for national liberation in all parts of the world meets with a warm response within the British working class movement, and especially among the students and the youth. The issues arising appear more frequently on the agenda of the annual conferences of the trade unions, the TUC and the Labour Party. The Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF), formed in April 1954 has won the affiliation of many trade unions on a national and district level, of scores of constituency Labour Parties and trades councils, and the adherence of many Labour MPs who wage a ceaseless fight on anti-imperialist issues.

The growing influence of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in Britain was recently expressed in the mighty opposition to racialism in South Africa, and the cancellation earlier this year of its racialist cricket tour in Britain—as well as racial discrimination in Britain itself. Many exiled leaders of liberation movements are now centred in this country, and their activity and publications are winning increasing support.

After 50 years the Communist Party is no longer alone in making the struggle against imperialism an outstanding issue in British politics. The anti-imperialist tide is rising to a new level, though it needs to rise higher still, with a deeper and more fundamental recognition that the advance to socialism in Britain is inseparable from the common international struggle to end British imperialism.

The Communist Party has the right to be proud of its record over the past 50 years. The younger generation (and even many of the older generation) may know little of this, and it will possibly be of considerable value for the anti-imperialist struggle which lies ahead to give a brief account of its record.

Early Years

The Communist Party was born in the course of the growing revolutionary tide after the 1917 Russian socialist revolution and the first world war. British workers expressed their solidarity with the new Soviet state, and their opposition to British threats of intervention, even before the formation of the Communist Party—as well as against the infamous 1918 Versailles Treaty, which was a big factor in creating the conditions which led to the growth of fascism in Germany.

British threats of intervention against the Soviet

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Union led to a mighty "Hands off Russia" campaign, reaching the stage when even the Trade Union Congress in September 1919 gave an ultimatum to the Government to withdraw its troops from Russia. The campaign led to the formation of Councils of Action, and reached a new intensity in May 1920 when it became known that the Government intended to ship arms on the "Jolly George" for Poland, for use against Russia. Harry Pollitt was in the forefront to prevent this. London dockers refused to load the vessel and the Government was forced to change its plans.

When the Founding Convention of the Communist Party was taking place in August 1920, the Second Congress of the Communist International was being held in Moscow, devoted mainly to the thesis on the National and Colonial Question. This was a basic document which served as a guide in the rising struggle for colonial liberation, and for the strategy of Communist Parties in imperialist countries in the common struggle.

Six months later it was published in English, with an introduction by the Executive Committee of the newly-formed Communist Party. This described the British Empire as an "inexhaustible field of exploitation for surplus capital" and provided "an inexhaustible supply of cheap labour", and that the "comparative prosperity of the British working class is built upon a hideous foundation". It went on to declare:

> "There can, therefore, be no truce with the British Empire for the workers . . . they know it stands for a system that is holding them down in common with the workers of a half-hundred different lands".

It was at this time that the British "Black and Tans" were active in Northern Ireland. The outcome of the British strategy of "divide and rule" (the model later for India and other colonies) was the partition of Ireland by the 1921 Northern Ireland Act—for which a heavy price is being paid in recent years. The Communist Party fought strongly against this, and has ever since maintained close ties with the revolutionary movement in Ireland, North and South—especially in the recent struggles.

In the early 1920's the Communist Party was active in many aspects and fields of international solidarity. On the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the 1914 world war it organised big meetings and demonstrations in all the main centres of Britain. At the same time it organised big campaigns in support of the revolutionary upsurge in China led by Sun Yat Sen, and mass protests and opposition to British threats of intervention and its backing for Chinese reaction, as part of the world-wide campaign of the Communist International under the slogan "Hands off the Chinese Revolution".

It opposed the imperialist Dawes Plan inflicted upon Germany (designed to extract more reparations), protested against the British bombing of civilians in Iraq, demanded the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and the Sudan, and won a considerable response from British workers and their trade unions against the political trials in India of Dange, Das Gupta, Usmani, and Muzaffer Ahmed who were sentenced at Cawnpore in April 1924 to four years in prison.

In the same month Negro and Indian workers in Georgetown (British Guiana) who were on strike were shot down by British troops. Twelve were killed and many more wounded. The Communist weekly organ, *Workers Weekly*, voiced strong protests from many Labour organisations. It also condemned the claim of the notorious J. H. Thomas that Kenya was being held "as a trust for the natives", and Ramsay MacDonald's refusal to change the political status of Cyprus. Later in 1924 there were similar protests against the arrest of national leaders in Burma, and against the infamous Bengal Special Ordinances under which Indian national leaders were arrested and their trial by jury suspended.

Within Britain itself the trade union movement was rapidly recovering from the defeat of the miners in the 1921 lock-out, and wage-cuts for engineers and others, and big advances were being made towards close relations with the Soviet trade unions. At the 1924 Hull Trade Union Congress a Soviet trade union delegation was greeted with great enthusiasm, and the British TUC was invited to send a delegation to the Soviet Union. The delegation went, and upon its return published a balanced and favourable report, and relations became still closer with the formation of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. This advance was a great tribute to the mass work of the Minority Movement (MM), formed early in 1924 to strive for a militant policy within the British trade union movement, and which had the full support of the Communist Party.

Sixth and Seventh Congresses of CPGB

At the same time the Communist Party was making great strides in clarifying its policy and strategy in the fight against imperialism. It was one of the outstanding discussions at its 6th Congress in May 1924. The resolution on this subject made clear that the Communist Party stood for the right of self-determination of the colonial peoples of the British Empire, and their full right to secession and independence, and went on to declare:

> "The continued enslavement of the colonial peoples makes our own freedom in this country absolutely impossible . . . it is necessary in the interests of our own struggle that assistance should

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be rendered to the workers in the colonies . . . This Congress, therefore, renews its pledges of solidarity with the struggling colonial workers, and promises the fullest possible assistance in the development of their own struggle for freedom".

This theme was further developed at the 7th Congress in Glasgow in May 1925, which adopted a thesis on the "Colonial Question and the Empire", and also a resolution against Imperialism. Presiding at the opening session, Harry Pollitt pointed out:

> "The hold of the bourgeoisie upon the British Empire is rapidly weakening. We see this if we look to the East, to Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. In all these places the working class movement is sweeping forward. Millions in Egypt, Iraq, Palestine and Kenya are undergoing a process of exploitation and slavery perpetrated by British capitalism. To these millions this Congress sends fraternal greetings and says: 'Your enemies are our enemies; we are of one class. We all fight against the British ruling class. We in our sphere will fight against them here at home, and do our utmost to help you in your revolutionary struggle against them . . .'
>
> "The struggle of the colonial peoples all over the world against British imperialism is also our struggle, and we shall help the colonial workers to the best of our ability and power."

The thesis stressed the identity of interests of the British workers and "the working and peasant masses throughout all countries oppressed by British Imperialism", and ended with the warning that:

> ". . . 'independence' will have no real meaning until it is achieved through the overthrow of Imperialism by a united working class movement embracing the peasantry, and all the exploited peoples of the Empire".

This view was repeated at the 8th Congress in Battersea in October 1926, and was a timely warning in light of the experience of the past two decades during which so many colonies have won their political independence, but still remain under the economic and financial grip of imperialism.

TUC—Scarborough and Liverpool

The Communist Party did not remain satisfied with defining its own political attitude, but strove to win support within the organised Labour movement for its policy. A big advance towards this was made at the 1925 Scarborough TUC in a resolution moved by A. A. Purcell, supported by Harry Pollitt, who followed the notorious J. H. Thomas. The resolution, acclaimed by Congress, reads as follows:

> "This Trade Union Congress believes that the domination of non-British peoples by the British Government is a form of capitalist exploitation having for its object the securing for British capitalists (1) of cheap sources of raw materials; (2) the right to exploit cheap and unorganised labour and to use the competition of that labour to degrade the workers' standards in Great Britain.
>
> "It declares its complete opposition to Imperialism, and resolves: (1) to support the workers in all parts of the British Empire to organise their Trade Unions and political parties in order to further their interests, and (2) to support the right of all peoples in the British Empire to self-determination including the right to choose complete separation from the Empire".

If the Scarborough TUC was a step forward the 1925 Liverpool Conference of the Labour Party was a serious step backwards. Not only did it take steps to drive Communists out of the Labour Party, but also adopted a resolution "A Labour Policy for the British Commonwealth of Nations", which was a complete retreat from the standpoint of the Scarborough TUC. Though admitting the "evils of capitalist exploitation" within the Empire, and the need to safeguard "the natives' right to land" it relied on the then League of Nations (dominated solely by imperialist powers) to frame a code for the protection of "native rights", and a resolution on similar lines was adopted at the 1926 Margate Conference of the Labour Party.

"Hands off China"

From 1925 onwards the political trend within the right-wing leadership of the Labour Party became more reactionary. In 1926 the General Council of the TUC betrayed the General Strike, and made fierce denunciations against the Minority Movement and encouraged attacks on the rights of Communists and other militants within the trade unions. The Communist Party fought against this reactionary trend, and did not forget to wage its struggle against imperialism. During 1925 and 1926 it waged a mighty "Hands Off China" campaign, supporting the big strike movement in Shanghai in February 1925, which in May 1925 developed into a mass anti-imperialist movement.

Before his untimely death in 1925 Sun Yat Sen had planned a great northern expedition by the Chinese Revolutionary Army, the aim of which was "not only to overthrow the warlords but also to drive out imperialism upon which the warlords in China depend for their existence". This expedition was launched in mid-1926, and before the end of that year Hankow had fallen to the revolutionaries, and it seemed that victory was within their grasp. It was then that the British Government used its pressure on the right wing of the Kuomintang to strike against the Communists.

Throughout September 1926 the Communist Party intensified its "Hands Off China" campaign, and at the Bournemouth TUC that year Arthur

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Horner moved an emergency resolution of solidarity with the Chinese people, stressing that the danger of intervention was not only against China, but also the Soviet Union. So strong was the growing movement of solidarity that even the 1926 Margate Conference of the Labour Party protested against the bombardment of Wanshien by British naval forces, and "welcomed the national and democratic tendencies among the Chinese people".

In November 1926 the *Workers Weekly* exposed the manoeuvres of the British Government in sending Miles Lampson as its new Minister to China. It declared that the British capitalists:

> ". . . have recognised the inevitable in the victory of the Kuomintang . . . their policy is subtly changing from that of brute force to the wooing over into the imperialist camp of the 'Right' or anti-Communist wing of the Kuomintang Party".

In December 1926 the Communist Party warned that "the danger of military action against the Chinese Revolution is increased rather than diminished by the latest manoeuvres of the British Government". This was unfortunately true, for in 1927 the Kuomintang (with the full backing of British and US imperialism) turned against the Communists, and there was a massive blood-bath of revolutionaries in many key cities. The counter-revolution won a temporary victory, and it took several years for the Chinese Revolution to regain its strength and to advance again towards its objective.

The Struggle in India

Together with its solidarity with the struggle in China the Communist Party focused its anti-imperialist activity in support of the national movement against British rule in India until independence was achieved in 1947. It sent a fraternal message of greetings in December 1926 to the Indian National Congress, and in the first part of 1927, Shapurji Saklatvala, Communist MP for Battersea, toured India in a big propaganda campaign.

Saklatvala was a symbol of the close relations between the British Communists and the struggle in India. One of the wealthy Tata family of Indian industrialists, he came to Britain in 1907, and was appalled at the poverty and exploitation within the citadel of imperialism. It was not long before he broke off relations with the wealthy Tatas, became a revolutionary and joined the Communist Party. Adopted as the official Labour candidate for North Battersea in 1922 (before Communists were driven out of the Labour Party), he was a powerful spokesman for Communism, not only for Indian freedom, but on all aspects of the struggle against imperialism.

Well known British Communists like George Allison, Ben Bradley, and Percy Glading went to India to assist the growth of the revolutionary movement. George Allison was active in building the Indian trade union movement, and was elected chairman of the reception committee of the All-India TUC on the eve of his arrest in 1927, and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

In March 1929, while the infamous Simon Commission appointed by the Baldwin Government was still in India, prominent leaders of the growing revolutionary movement (Ben Bradley among them) were arrested and placed on trial at Meerut. The trial dragged on for years, and savage sentences were imposed in January 1933.

During all these years the Communist Party waged a mighty campaign of solidarity with the national struggle in India. Nor was it alone. The India League (with the still surviving Krishna Menon at its head) won a tremendous response within the Labour movement for the release of the Meerut prisoners. Nehru himself spoke at big meetings and rallies in Britain. R. Palme Dutt's book *India Today*, published by the *Left Book Club* in the 1930's helped to make India a big issue in Britain. After the Second World War it was impossible for British imperialism to hold India any longer, and independence was achieved in 1947—though at the price of partition. R. Palme Dutt made a tour of India, as did Harry Pollitt in 1954, and the close relations of the Communist Party with India's fight for freedom have continued in the new situation which has existed since 1947.

One cannot forget the great contribution of the British Section of the International League against Imperialism, formed in April 1927, to the great solidarity campaign in Britain with the struggle in India—though it was active also against British imperialist oppression in Egypt, in support of the revolt in Palestine, and the struggle for freedom in South Africa. At its conferences fraternal messages and delegates came from India, China, Cyprus, Nigeria, Burma and other countries, and its journal *Inside the Empire* made a big impact.

The Communist party was affiliated to the League, and in November 1929 the Labour Party Executive banned League members from the Labour Party, and the Labour and Socialist International took similar action on an international level. At first Fenner Brockway was chairman of the British Section, and was also on the Executive of the Labour and Socialist International, but after this decision felt he had no option but to resign from his position in the League.

The Fight Against Fascism

While still active in the struggle for colonial freedom, after Hitler came to power in 1933 the Communist Party put its main emphasis on the fight against fascism—for Hitler's expansionist aims

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were also a threat to the colonial world. The Communist Party was foremost in opposition to Italian fascism and the invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, and especially against Italian and German fascist intervention in Republican Spain in support of General Franco.

It was the spearhead of the mighty campaign in Britain against the "non-intervention" policy of the British Government, which was fully supported by the right-wing Labour leaders. The Communist Party was the driving force in recruiting volunteers to form the British Battalion of the International Brigade of which Harry Pollitt himself was the main inspirer. Of the 1,500 British volunteers who fought in Spain, about half were Communists, and YCL'ers as were a similar proportion of the 533 who were killed. Many outstanding Communist leaders, like Ralph Fox, Wally Tapsell, John Cornford, David Guest and others gave their lives in defence of Republican Spain.

At the same time, the Communist Party was in the forefront of the opposition to Mosley fascism in Britain. It was the main force behind the big conferences and huge rallies which won tremendous support throughout the Labour movement. In September 1934 the Mosley demonstration in Hyde Park had almost as many police around it, to keep back an anti-fascist rally many times bigger, and in Belle Vue in Manchester in October the voice of Mosley was drowned in a sea of opposition. All over the country Mosley suffered one serious rebuff after another, the high spot being the complete rout of the Mosleyite marchers at Cable Street in the East End of London in October 1936.

Second World War and After

Long before September 1939 the Communist Party had fought consistently for a peace policy, and urged that Britain and France should join with the Soviet Union in a peace front which could halt the advance of fascism and defeat its aggressive aims. The Chamberlain Government did its utmost to prevent this, and the outcome was the outbreak of the second world war.

After the defeat of France in 1940 Britain was left alone to fight Nazi Germany, but with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 it won a mighty ally in building a powerful front against Hitler's armed forces. In Churchill's words, the Soviet armed forces "tore the guts" out of the mammoth forces of Nazi Germany, and were extremely popular among the vast majority of the British people and the whole civilised world. The Communist Party threw its whole weight into the war effort, and the alliance with the Soviet Union stimulated war production and breathed a spirit of confidence and enthusiasm into the struggle to defeat fascism.

After nearly six long years the war was over. In the 1945 General Election two Communists (William Gallacher and Phil Piratin) were elected to Parliament, with a narrow miss for Harry Pollitt in Rhondda East. Both Gallacher and Piratin did a tremendous job in Parliament on anti-colonial issues. Not only did they intervene in every debate on this subject (especially on China, India, Egypt, Palestine, and South Africa) but put down a multitude of questions on all aspects of British colonial policy. Delegations and individual leaders from the colonies coming to London sought out the two Communist MPs whom they knew would readily support their struggle. Gallacher had first been elected in 1935 and by this time was an experienced Parliamentary fighter.

During 1945 and 1946 the Communist Party strongly attacked British Government policy in relation to Greece, by which British troops were used to prop up the forces of reaction which had supported fascism during the war. It demanded the unconditional withdrawal of troops from Egypt, supported the struggle for independence in Sudan, pressed for free elections in Iraq, and protested against what became known as the "Ghetto Bill" in South Africa.

It welcomed the formation of the Kenya African Union, and the serious efforts being made to encourage the growth of the liberation movement in Tanganyika and Uganda, supported the demand for the right to form African trade unions in north and southern Rhodesia, and strongly attacked the UN decision to place South West Africa under the trusteeship of racialist South Africa.

International Conference

In the early part of 1947 it organised an international conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in the countries of the British Empire. Delegates came from Australia, Canada, South Africa, India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Cyprus, Palestine, both parts of Ireland, and from West Africa. This is part of the final conference declaration:

> "We condemn the continued occupation of Greece, the subjection of Cyprus and Malta, the holding down of Palestine, the bolstering up of reactionary feudal puppet regimes in Iraq and Transjordan, the retention of British troops in Egypt, the categorical refusal to recognise the national independence of India and Burma, and the maintenance and use of British troops in these countries to suppress their freedom movements, and the military aid given by British imperialism to crush the liberation struggle of the peoples of Indonesia and Vietnam . . . We condemn the denial of elementary rights and liberties, the widespread practice of racial and colour discrimination in Africa and other British Empire territories. We

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> demand the repeal of all oppressive and discriminatory legislation, ordinances and laws; the provision of popular legislative assemblies based on universal suffrage, freedom of speech, movement, association and organisation, and declare our full support to these peoples in their aspirations for freedom and the right of self-determination".

The conference was almost prophetic in its warning of the consequences of imperialist policy on Palestine when it emphasised:

> "We warn all Jewish people that Zionism . . . diverts Jewish people from the real solution of the problem of anti-Semitism . . . and to oppose the Zionist conception which seeks to put them in the position of being an instrument of imperialism in the Middle East".

Solidarity Continues

From 1948 onwards the Communist Party focused its anti-colonial policy on the freedom struggle in Malaya and in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) for which it strove to win support in Britain. In February 1948 police fired on a peaceful demonstration in the Gold Coast, killing 22 Africans and wounding 228 others. The Communist Party waged a widespread protest campaign in Britain, and two years later the British Government was forced to consider the first steps towards internal self-government in the Gold Coast, and in 1951 Kwame Nkrumah was released from prison to become the first African chief Minister.

The struggle was not confined to the Gold Coast. In November 1949 forty striking coal miners at Enugu in Nigeria were shot and killed, and many more wounded. All they were fighting for was a daily wage of 5/10d. At that time the 21st Congress of the Communist Party was being held in Manchester, and one of its first acts was to adopt an emergency resolution of protest, calling upon the Labour Colonial Secretary to dismiss the British Governor and Chief of Police, grant the miners' demands, and to pay adequate compensation to the wounded and to the dependants of the slaughtered miners.

The resolution called upon the British Government to withdraw British troops from Nigeria, to repeal the anti-democratic and anti-working class legislation, and to take steps for the holding of democratic elections based on universal suffrage to elect a Nigerian constituent assembly.

In October 1949 the Chinese Revolution achieved its great victory. Having failed to crush it US imperialism vented its spleen a year later with its war of aggression against North Korea, with British armed forces being sent to assist. This ferocious attack was fiercely resisted by the heroic North Koreans, who received massive aid from the new China and many thousands of volunteers. The Communist Party waged a big campaign of solidarity in Britain against a heavy barrage of hostile propaganda and the attempt to shield the actions of the Labour Government, which the Tory Government continued after the 1951 elections.

One of the most sordid actions of the Labour Government in January 1950 was to invite Seretse Khama, acclaimed as king by the tribal kgotla of the Bamangwato people in Bechuanaland (now Botswana) to come to London for discussions. An attempt was made to bribe him with an annuity of £1,100 to stay out of his country for five years. His sole "crime" was his marriage to a white woman, falsely alleged to be resented by the Bamangwato people, but in reality the objection came from Dr. Malan, then Prime Minister of racialist South Africa.

This aroused a mass protest movement in Britain in which the Communist Party was extremely active. Seretse Khama refused the bribe, and messages of support for the campaign from a host of Labour and progressive organisations in Britain, and from the whole colonial world. The pressure for the return of Seretse Khama "without strings" went on for nearly three years, when he and his wife were allowed to return, and he is now President of independent Botswana.

From 1948 onwards the Communist Party was most active against the shameful war in Malaya. Early this year some British soldiers confessed they had been ordered to shoot innocent civilians in the Bawang and Batang Kali areas of North Selangar, and the British press and TV treated this as a great revelation. The fact is that the *Daily Worker* gave it full publicity at the time.

The Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* waged a consistent campaign for many years against this gruesome war, against the bombing of villages and revolting massacres of Malayans, distributed hundreds of thousands of leaflets, published pamphlets "STOP THE WAR IN MALAYA", and succeeded in getting thousands of protest resolutions from the Labour and progressive movement.

Africa on the March

From 1952 onwards the liberation movement advanced with increasing speed, and spread from Asia throughout the Middle East, extended to the whole continent of Africa, and over to the Caribbean and the whole of Latin America. Africa was in the forefront, and during the next decade most African countries won their independence.

In racialist South Africa the "Suppression of Communism Act" was applied more ruthlessly, and all who opposed *apartheid* were labelled Communists. Many hundreds (later mounting to thousands) were put on the banned list. African

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trade unions were suppressed, together with white trade union leaders who tried to organise Africans. Progressive journals were banned, and pass laws more rigidly enforced.

This led to the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 when 56 Africans (including women and children) were killed and 162 wounded. Within a few days the Communist Party produced an AFRICAN SPECIAL which soon had a mass sale, and throughout Britain there was an enormous protest campaign, leading later to the formation of the "Anti-Apartheid Movement", which for many years has had the full support of the Communist Party—as well as the South African Communist Party which has waged such an heroic struggle.

Before its defeat in the 1951 General Election the Labour Government had prepared the way for the formation of a Central African Federation in which Africans in North and South Rhodesia and in Nyasaland would be brought more firmly under white minority rule, and the Tory Government went ahead with this project. The Communist Party waged a big campaign against this, supporting the African demand for "one man one vote", equal democratic rights, and for political independence.

In October 1952 more than 37,000 African copper miners in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) waged a massive strike for an increase of 2/6d. in the daily wage. After several weeks they won a substantial increase, but in later years further strikes took place, closely associated with the demand of the African National Congress for an end to the Central African Federation. Further strikes in 1955 won new concessions. The Communist Party was active in winning solidarity in Britain. The Scottish and Welsh miners sent £1,000 to the strike fund, as did the National Executive of the NUM.

The liberation struggle in Egypt reached a new stage with the victory of the national revolution in July 1952, led by the "Free Officers' Committee", headed by Neguib and Nasser, when King Farouk was forced to abdicate. In the first stages the situation was somewhat confused, and later Neguib was replaced by Nasser as the leading figure. The Communist Party (though critical of some of its features, especially the persecution of Communists) welcomed this great change.

A new situation arose in October 1956 when Britain and France joined with Israel in an aggressive war launched against Egypt after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The MCF had taken the initiative in booking Trafalgar Square for a protest demonstration, and the pressure upon the Labour Party became so strong that it agreed to co-operate in the protest, in which the most applauded speech was from an Egyptian Communist, then studying in Britain.

In September 1952 the British Government struck its blow against the Kenya African Union, arrested Jomo Kenyatta and other leaders, and waged a ferocious attack against what was described as the "Mau Mau" movement—in reality an armed struggle which expressed the determination of the Africans to fight for land and against white minority rule. The Communist Party initiated the formation of a Kenya Defence Committee, which waged a widespread campaign of solidarity and won considerable support throughout Britain for the African struggle in Kenya.

Kenya remained in the forefront of the Communist anti-colonial campaign in Britain for some years. Protests were made against the sentences on Kenyatta and other leaders, with a strong demand for the withdrawal of British troops and an end to the terror. There was a national day of protest on December 9, 1953 and many thousands of leaflets, together with a pamphlet "The Truth about Kenya" were distributed.

The African liberation struggle was now foremost in the solidarity campaigns being organised in Britain. In May 1953 the Communist Party published a manifesto for mass distribution in the factories and streets, ending with the demands:

Withdraw British Troops from Kenya.
Oppose Central African Federation.
End the Ban on Seretse.
Protest against Fascism in South Africa.
Support the Nigerian Fight for Independence.

Ghana independence was achieved in 1957, Senegal, Guinea, Mali and most ex-French colonies in 1958 and later, then Nigeria in 1960, the ex-Belgian Congo, and then Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi—so that by the mid-1960's only the southern part of Africa remained under white minority rule. After the great "Congress of the People" in South Africa in 1955 (which brought the liberation movements into one front with a united programme) came the infamous Treason Trial in 1956 in which 152 prominent men and women were charged. The trial went on into 1957, and in the end had to be abandoned, and the prisoners released.

The sweeping tide of the liberation struggle made 1960 the "Africa Year". At the 26th Congress during Easter 1959 R. Palme Dutt moved an emergency resolution of solidarity with the heroic struggle being waged. There had been a mass upsurge in Nyasaland (now Malawi), Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and in Southern Rhodesia against the Central African Federation, and for "one man one vote".

In Nyasaland 49 Africans were shot and killed, over 100 wounded and 600 put in prison without trial. More than 500 in Southern Rhodesia were put in prison and about 100 in Northern Rhodesia. The Congress resolution made a strong call to:

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End the Emergency—Withdraw the Troops.
Release all African Prisoners.
Withdraw the Fascist Laws.
Universal Franchise for all Africans.
Recognise the Right to Independence.

In January 1960 African liberation was the main subject at an Executive meeting of the Communist Party. The report was published in full in *World News*, and gave a strong impetus to the solidarity campaign in support of Patrice Lumumba and Congo independence, for the dissolution of the Central African Federation, the withdrawal of charges in the Treason Trial in South Africa, and support for the struggle in Kenya.

Guyana

Early in 1953 the Peoples Progressive Party, then led by Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham, won an outstanding victory in the first democratic elections in British Guiana. After 133 days in office the British Government sent warships and troops and deposed the new Government. This gave rise to a tremendous mass movement of protest throughout Britain, involving many national trade unions, scores of Labour MPs, and protests even by the TUC and Labour Party.

Two years before, I had become secretary of the International Department, and I well remember the morning the news came of the despatch of British troops and warships. Harry Pollitt was always first in the office, and when I arrived had already prepared a draft statement for next day's *Daily Worker*. Harry took a keen interest in the protest campaign, and the Communist Party responded in a mighty solidarity campaign. Soon, Burnham broke away from the PPP, but the PPP won in the two succeeding elections until British fraudulent manoeuvres enabled Burnham to drive the PPP from office.

At this time also, British imperialism was striving to impose a Caribbean Federation for the separate territories, which would enable it to strengthen its grip. The "Caribbean Labour Congress", which was also active in Britain urged independence for the separate territories as an essential condition before there could be a real democratic federation. The Communist Party supported this view, and within a couple of years the much-vaunted Federation broke down, largely due to Jamaican opposition.

Middle East

Together with its support for the struggle in Egypt the Communist Party strongly opposed the repression in Iraq, and in May 1953 made a call for protest resolutions against the arrest and subsequent secret execution of four Communist leaders in Iraq. In July 1958 came the Iraqi national revolution, when the dictatorship of Nuri Said and King Faisal was overthrown by the progressive armed forces led by General Kassem. For a time the masses of workers and peasants rejoiced in a new-found freedom, but the Communist Party was denied legal recognition. Step by step the situation worsened, until in 1963 there was a Baathist coup in which Kassem was killed, after which there was even greater persecution of the Communists.

The Communist Party has always had close ties with Iraq, and has consistently organised solidarity actions in Britain with its Communist Party and the liberation struggle. Iraqi students in Britain have always been an active force in these campaigns.

1954 Conferences

The consistent efforts to strengthen the international front against imperialism reached a new stage in April 1954 when Communist and Workers' Parties within the sphere of British imperialism met in London. Delegates came from Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, and from other countries (Malaya, Jamaica, India, Trinidad, Ceylon, Nigeria, Mauritius and British Guiana) there were students and workers then residing in Britain.

From Sudan and Iraq there were official delegates who found their way illegally into Britain but were unable to speak in the open sessions, and their speeches were read out for them. There were also fraternal messages from the Communist Parties in India, Ceylon and Pakistan, and the veteran Wallace-Johnson was present to extend greetings from West Africa. There was also a young British soldier who gave a vivid account of the methods of British mass slaughter in Kenya.

R. Palme Dutt made a powerful opening statement, and veterans like J. B. Miles (Australia), Tim Buck (Canada), Andrew Rothstein, Ben Bradley, and Bob Stewart took part in the discussion. There were emergency resolutions on Malaya, Kenya, and British Guiana, and Harry Pollitt made a rousing closing speech, moving a manifesto on the theme of building "the mighty alliance of our peoples against the reactionary alliance of American and British imperialism".

Another big event in 1954 was the formation of the "Movement for Colonial Freedom" (MCF), inspired mainly by the untiring work and initiative of Fenner Brockway. It was a new departure in united front movements in Britain insofar as it was based mainly on the affiliation of trade unions, trades councils, and constituency Labour Parties, together with the sponsorship of many scores of Labour MPs, trade union and other progressive leaders. It has always been open to members of all political parties, and individual Communists have always been active in its ranks, and in recent years

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within its leadership. Though based on affiliations it is the individual membership which is the driving force in its activity and campaigns.

During the past decade the national liberation movement has made enormous strides forward in all parts of the world. One cannot hope to give an adequate account of the vastly increased activity for solidarity in Britain during this period. It had now reached a higher level than at any time in the past 50 years. With the achievement of political independence on so vast a scale the forms and methods of solidarity action have changed in many respects, but the armed struggle is still going on in southern Africa and other parts of the world, not to mention the heroic struggle being waged in Vietnam.

In my position as Secretary of the International Department for 18 years (1951-69) I know from my own experience of the long-standing close relations between the Communist Party and leaders of liberation movements in all parts of the world. Before political independence they made contact with us during visits to London, and when on delegations to discuss constitutions for political independence.

The Communist Party since its formation has always expressed its solidarity with the liberation struggle in Vietnam. It was among the first to condemn, early in 1955, the preliminary stages of United States intervention, in violation of the 1954 Geneva conference decisions.

Support for Vietnam

In recent years the expansion of the United States war of aggression has aroused nationwide opposition. In reaching this stage the Communist Party and Young Communist League have been to the fore-front—in demonstrations, mass meetings, petitions, lobbies to Parliament, and raising money for the medical fund. From 1965 onwards solidarity with the liberation struggle in Vietnam has been a prominent feature in all the National Congresses of the Communist Party, and in 1965 John Gollan Bill Alexander and John Mahon made a fraternal visit to North Vietnam.

The Communist Party has co-operated with the Movement for Colonial Freedom, British Peace Committee, CND, British-Vietnam Committee, and all progressive forces in the Labour and Co-operative Movement in arousing opposition to United States aggression and winning solidarity for the liberation struggle in Vietnam. This rising mass pressure has been successful in getting the annual conferences of the TUC and the Labour Party to support the demand for the complete withdrawal of United States armed forces as the first essential step towards peace in Vietnam.

The *Morning Star* preserves the splendid record of the former *Daily Worker* in voicing solidarity with all aspects of the liberation struggle, supplemented by the weekly journal *Comment*, the monthly journal *Marxism Today* and the *Labour Monthly*. Moreover, in our educational work, schools and seminars on imperialism and the liberation struggle have been a prominent feature.

Today, the Communist Party has close relations with Communist Parties which exist in the newly-independent states, and with liberation movements where they do not exist. In recent years fraternal delegates have spoken at our Congresses from the African National Congress of South Africa, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union, and the South West African Peoples Organisation. All of them pay tribute to the scope and character of our activity to organise solidarity in Britain.

Within the present world-wide struggle for liberation there are three main sectors—the heroic struggle in Vietnam, the Arab struggle for liberation, and the fight for liberation in southern Africa. On all three fronts the Communist Party strives to win solidarity in Britain.

This does not mean we can be satisfied. Britain is still the centre of a vast imperialist system, and we cannot advance on the British road to socialism unless there are stronger bonds with the liberation struggle in all parts of the world. There is still an urgent need throughout the Party for a higher level of political understanding and conviction on the need for this united struggle, and this is still the big lesson for us on this 50th anniversary.

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The General Strike and Class Struggles in the North-East: 1925–28

George Short

The author, himself a miner until the early 1920's, joined the Communist Party in 1926. He was elected a member of the Executive Committee in 1929. He worked full-time for the Party, as District Secretary in Tees-side for thirty years (1930-1960) and retired from full-time work owing to ill health. Like many others he was sent to prison for 3 months during the unemployed struggles of the early '30s.

Prior to May 1st, 1926

The stubborn and bitter resistance, in the face of unbelievable provocation and persecution, put up by the Durham miners in the seven months following the General Strike of 1926, can only be understood if one takes a look at the events that preceded this historic event, particularly the nine months prior to May 1st, 1926.

The plans for a massive confrontation between Capital and Labour had been well and truly laid. On June 30th, 1925, the mineowners (nationally) had served notice to terminate the existing agreements, proposing drastic wage reductions, the abolition of the principle of a minimum wage, and the reversion to District Agreements. Mr. Baldwin and his Government, in close consultation with the powerful mineowners, made no secret of the fact in the 1925 negotiations, that not only for the miners, but also for the rest of the workers, wage reductions were inevitable. This was revealed by a report of a discussion between the miners and the Prime Minister, published in the *Daily Herald* on July 31st, 1925.

> Miners: "But what you propose means a reduction of wages".
> Prime Minister: "Yes. All the workers in this country have got to face a reduction in wages".
> Miners: "What do you mean?"
> Prime Minister: "I mean all the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet".

The knowledge of this fact hardened the resistance of the organised working class, and produced such unity and solidarity, that it took the Government completely by surprise. Caught unprepared for an immediate struggle, the Government on July 30th, 1925, made the offer of a nine months subsidy to the coal-owners, to enable them to maintain the status quo, both with regard to wages and hours of the miners. The official reason given for such a subsidy, was to enable the industry to sort out its problems and arrive at a peaceful solution of the differences between the miners and the coal-owners.

It soon became abundantly clear what the object of the Government was in securing this brief breathing space. It began to organise its OMS (Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies). It divided the country into twelve areas, and appointed a Commissioner for each. This Commissioner was armed with complete dictatorial powers under the Emergency Powers Act. These Emergency Powers were put into force from month to month, by Royal Proclamation. They were renewed each month as long as the struggle lasted. Anything the police considered they could suppress, they did, considering anything with which they disapproved as a crime, and treating it accordingly.

The Durham Coalfield

The Durham mine-owners were already preparing for the confrontation. In the coalfield they were tackling the miners pit by pit. The pattern was the same everywhere. The coal company would deliver a "take it or leave it" ultimatum to the men at a particular pit. This would intimate that, as from a certain date, there would be a drastic downward revision of piece-work prices, and an alteration in the shift system which involved a lengthening of the working day.

"Take it or Leave it"

In the North-West of Durham, where the Consett Iron Company had swollen through the years, there was particularly fierce struggle. Many of its pits lay in the urban district council of Blaydon-on-Tyne, the scene for the famous song "The Blaydon

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Races". Early in this century Blaydon became an Urban District Council. It now has a population of 31,000 but 40 years ago, before the depopulation through the closing of so many pits, it was considerably more.

The main owners were the Consett Iron Company Limited. Their pits lay at Garesfield in High Spen (with Rowlands Gill as the nearest railway station) with over a thousand miners; the three Chopwell pits, with a total of over two thousand (2,189) miners, to which the nearest station was High Westwood. Then there was another pit with 1,125 miners at Consett itself, and yet another at Westwood, with 666 miners. Altogether, the Consett Company owned a dozen pits where the miners worked, and near which they lived. The half-dozen directors of the Company did not live there, but in more salubrious parts, such as Hexham, or in Espley Hall at Morpeth, or right away down in the charming localities of the Cotswolds.

Besides them there was another company called Priestman Collieries Limited (see *Colliery Year Book* for 1928, p. 343) whose chief directors lived around Shotley Bridge. They owned Victoria Garesfield at Rowlands Gill, with 581 miners; Blaydon Burn ("Bessie" and "Mary") both at Blaydon-on-Tyne itself with 1,312 employed, and the Lilley Drift, which had 556 miners. There were also a little bit away from us, the pits Priestman owned at Swalwell, Gateshead and Chester-le-Street.

There may have been other companies. But these were the main companies and these were their pits. Altogether the two sets of mine-owners employed many thousands of miners.

There was no other industry apart from the usual little bit of agriculture in a few upland farms, as well as, of course, transport by rail attached to coal-mining. The Consett Iron Company dealt with the separate collieries one by one.

In those pit villages where these harsh conditions were rejected, there the miners were locked out on the appointed day. Such lock-outs produced hard and bitter struggles in some villages, lasting in some cases, three to six months, and the Chopwell colliery, owned by the Consett Iron Company, the miners and their wives fought bitterly, under extremely difficult conditions, for two long years. Their stubborn resistance, their activity during the General Strike; their new Lodge banner that appeared on July 30th, 1926, bearing the portraits of Karl Marx, Lenin and A. J. Cook, earned for their village the title of "Little Moscow". To this very day, Chopwell can still boast of its Marx Terrace, Lenin Terrace and E. D. Morell Terrace. A tribute to the class consciousness of the "old type of socialist Labour man".

The fight against the guerrilla warfare of the Durham Coal companies was not, however, an unrelieved fight against starvation and powerful odds. In this fight the miners learned valuable lessons, and achieved important victories, which explain why the Durham miners were able to play such a valiant part in those seven long months that followed the collapse of the General Strike. Seven important months that helped to cushion the railway and other workers against the worst effects of that great betrayal of working class solidarity. For example, the old traditional system of communal "soup kitchens" had already been developed in many villages. Getting their supplies from a variety of sources, and giving to all in need, each day, a canful of rich, nutritious soup.

In many areas the Labour Party had already won decisive majorities on local councils, and Boards of Guardians. Here they also saw to it that they also got control of such bodies as School Management Committees. In villages like Chopwell, where the split between Communists and Labour people was as yet non-existent, every foothold in public authority was used in some way to defend the miners and their families in the bitter struggle that was raging. A particularly important role was played by the Co-operative movement. Retail Societies really became "class weapons" in the hands of the miners.

Preparations for the Strike

On this background the General Strike became a very important and high flash-point in the struggle of the Durham miners against the Durham coal-owners. In Chopwell the men had already been locked out for eighteen months. In the adjoining village of High Spen, the lock-out had been lifted, and an agreement gained with the Consett Iron Company, after three months stubborn resistance by the miners.

The Chopwell, Spen and District LRC had been making extensive preparations for May Day—Saturday, May 1st, 1926. A central demonstration was planned to take place at Highfield, to which the miners and their wives marched, behind the various Lodge banners. From each village, horse-drawn carts and lorries were laid on to transport the children.

This May Day was the biggest ever held—before or since—in that area. The turn-out exceeded even the hopes of the organisers—it was a tremendous demonstration of solidarity. The main speaker was R. Page Arnot, one of the twelve members of the Communist Party sent to prison the previous year for being a member of the National EC of the Party.

On the Saturday evening R. Page Arnot and Steve Lawther (Secretary of the local LRC) together with three other officials from neighbouring mining villages met in the Chopwell Workmen's Club.

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Here it was agreed to convene a special meeting of the LRC for the following night, Sunday, May 2nd. To this were invited, by special visitation, all the delegates to the LRC, all Labour councillors on the Blaydon UDC, Trade Union Branch Secretaries and Secretaries of the Blaydon Labour and Communist Parties. At this moment there was no Communist Party branch at Chopwell, and only two or three members at High Spen. On the day previous (Friday, July 30th, 1926) R. Page Arnot had addressed a closed meeting of the Newcastle Party branch, together with members from nearby villages. Here he outlined the Party's plan for the whole of the area, prior to fulfilling his May Day commitments for the Spen, Chopwell and District LRC.

At this very crowded and tense meeting, Will Lawther, a member of the Labour Party EC presided. R. P. Arnot made the opening statement. He introduced a document which started by suggesting "that no time be spent discussing the purpose of the Strike, its national or international implications, but attention be concentrated on the immediate objective, i.e. defeat the Civil Commissioner (Sir Kingsley Wood) appointed by the Government to control the North East area of the country". This note, to some 50 delegates, Urban District Councillors, TU officials, all intimately connected with the mining industry, awakened an immediate response. They listened with rapt attention as R. Page Arnot outlined in detail the steps needed to be taken for carrying out the General Strike, due to commence on May 4th. There were no divisions in this meeting; the practical steps proposed met with unanimous approval. These included first, the need to establish in Durham and Northumberland, a network of Councils of Action, co-ordinated by a Central Council of Action in Newcastle. These Councils of Action would undertake full direction of all strike activities, the central aim being to (a) ensure complete cessation of work, and (b) complete control of the movement of transport.

> "Those who control the movement of food supplies and transport generally, will have control of the situation".

These words, spoken by R. P. Arnot, quietly and without heat, were to prove almost prophetic in the following ten days.

On Monday, May 3rd, whilst R. P. Arnot, together with such people as Will Lawther, Ebby Edwards, etc., were attempting the difficult task of putting into effect the proposal for a Regional Council of Action, volunteers on motor-cycles, push-bikes, old vans (anything that would travel) ranged far and wide over the two counties. Here the writer speaks from experience. On the pillion of a motor-cycle, I was to cover the villages of North-West Durham, ranging as far to the West as Tow Law. We left Chopwell very early in the morning. For most villages I had at least a name, either a Miners' lodge secretary, or official of the local Labour Party. At each village the approach was as follows:

> "Has a Council of Action been set up yet? If not, you must get the responsible people together at once. Send a representative to report immediately to the Central Council of Action in Newcastle. The Council of Action must remain in constant session. As from tomorrow, nothing must be allowed to move without your consent".

The response to this was tremendous. It reflected the discipline that existed amongst working class people, and the readiness to respond to a clear and decisive lead. Overnight, the wide network of Councils of Action were in being. With a thoroughness that reflected the conscious struggle of the miners, control of the roads and everything that moved on them, was being established. Mass pickets on all roads leading to a particular village, became the order of the day.

The Councils of Action

The work of these Councils of Action varied from place to place. They had however, certain things in common. Brought into existence practically overnight, their organisation improved daily as did their authority in the area covered by them. In the North East, particularly in the coalfields, the problem of picketing places of work was non-existent. In fact, the problem for some Unions was to keep men at work until the TUC gave the call to bring them out. Therefore the main concentration was on bringing all transport to a halt. Then deciding what, if anything, could be allowed to move.

The Council of Action became both a place of authority and a hive of activity. In most places remaining in constant session. The Chopwell Council of Action worked in such a way. In the early morning Committees responsible for certain aspects of work, i.e. picketing, publicity, soup kitchen, etc., would hold brief meetings then away to put decisions into effect. At midnight, a general meeting to check on events of the day and general directives for daybreak. The headquarters of the Council of Action was the small office of the UDC Sanitary Inspector. This was taken over on the authority of Councillor Harry Bolton, Chairman of the Blaydon Urban District Council, who incidentally, with the full support of the Labour majority, used his position as chairman both to assist the Chopwell, Spen and Blaydon Councils of Action, and prevent the Government Commissioner from using the machinery of local Government in any way. For example, his first act, on Monday, May 3rd,

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was to interview each member of the Council office staff. He told those whom he could not trust that they were on two weeks' holiday as from that day. Not only the Sanitary Office at Chopwell, with its telephone and typewriter, but the excellent duplicator and supplies at Blaydon Offices were placed at the disposal of the Council of Action.

The first task of the morning of Tuesday, May 4th, was twofold. Man the main roads leading into the villages of High Spen, Rowlands Gill and Chopwell and sell the only paper that would appear in the area that morning—a *Strike Bulletin* that had been prepared over the weekend and printed by Thomas Summerbell of Sunderland. Willing workers were plentiful. Those intended for picketing came ready prepared with a coal-hewers pick-shaft. The younger and more energetic lads were turned loose on the village streets for door to door sale of the printed *Strike Bulletin*. Here it was just a question of what area one could cover in the shortest possible time. The *Strike Bulletin* was snapped up. People were anxious to get news they could trust. It gave details of what was taking place, proclaimed the General Strike as already a success, and warned people against believing anything they heard from Government sources.

Strike Bulletins

The very success of the printed bulletin raised immediately the question of producing more. The problem was how. At Blaydon, the Council of Action was already using the UDC duplicator to get out a duplicated sheet. *The Northern Light*. It was realised that it was only a matter of time before the Police stepped in to take over this valuable equipment. Therefore it was decided, again with the authority of Harry Bolton (Chairman of the UDC), to remove the duplicator to a safer place. Four young workers from Chopwell, with the help of Blaydon comrades removed the machine, together with all available supplies of paper, stencils and ink, and transferred it to an uncompleted council house in E. D. Morell Terrace, Chopwell.

The *Northern Light* was in business as an illegal strike bulletin with a vengeance. Experiences in producing and selling it showed how helpless the police could become against workers who were supported and protected by the people amongst whom they lived. For example, the police made repeated attempts to apprehend sellers of the bulletin but as soon as the police put in an appearance, the sellers in danger were warned. They would dive into the nearest house. A woman would take charge of the bulletins and under an apron or shawl take them across the road into the next street. The seller would wander out—an idle sightseer and through another house. This way seller and bulletins would be taken to safety and the sale would go on. In their efforts to lay hands on the duplicator the police were equally unsuccessful. No chances were taken for its safety. When the occasion arose, people in a nearby house would be warned that they were needed to give it shelter. Then under cover of darkness willing hands manhandled with care the valuable equipment.

Mass Pickets

The mass pickets that manned the roads on the morning of May 4th became more organised and disciplined as the week went by. They took control at strategic points of all roads into their villages. Each picket had a leader and they worked in shifts, reporting on and off duty to the Council of Action premises. At all times those in charge at the Council of Action were in touch with what was happening on the roads. The pickets had strict instructions to avoid head-on clashes with police, but by sheer weight of numbers render their road impassable.

In addition to the mass pickets at the entrances to the village, the Chopwell and High Spen Councils of Action took an additional step. Two flying pickets were organised; these comprised of about eight to ten men each, quietly left the village, to assemble, either on the main road, Newcastle to Consett, or Newcastle to Hexham. Their instructions were to stop and immobilise anything that had managed to pass (maybe with police help) a mass picket.

This form of activity worried the police. Their mobile squad raced up and down long stretches of road, but never seemed to be on the spot when required. The offending vehicle would have been effectively dealt with, the picket would have melted away over fields and woodlands, to reassemble at some pre-arranged spot; the police must have felt they were fighting a shadow. Only transport which carried a Council of Action permit was allowed to move unmolested. For example, at High Spen a lorry-load of foodstuffs got through the net, and arrived at the outskirts of the village. The mass picket was very polite—"Yes, it could enter". When the lorry reached the shop in the main street, willing hands unloaded everything on to the side-walk. The strikers' wives had gathered to witness this strange sight and were invited to "take what you can carry quickly". In less time than it takes to tell, the entire load had disappeared.

At Chopwell, learning the lesson of this experience, a lorry under very heavy police guard, made a delivery at Moores Stores. Only a strong appeal from strike leaders prevented a pitched battle. But that was the most costly delivery that multiple store ever received. Despite all efforts to keep open, including provocative "police protection", the store was compelled, within weeks, to close its doors, never to open again.

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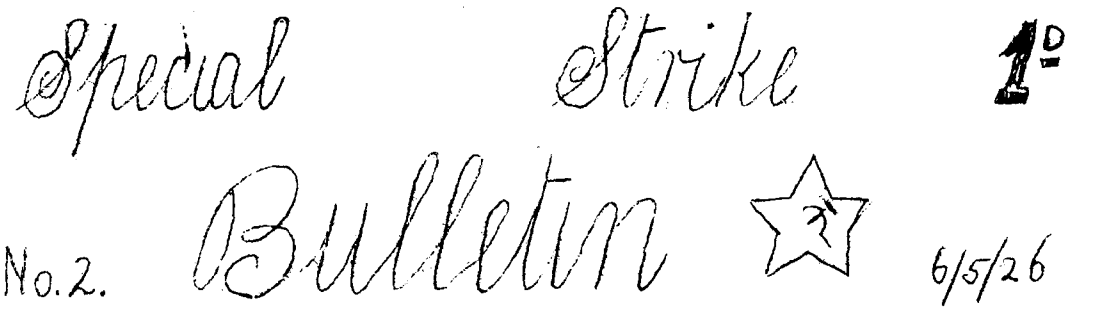
Special Strike 1D
Bulletin
No. 2.
6/5/26
Issued by the District Party Committee of the Communist Party of Gr. Br.
THE STRIKE SPREADING
More and More Workers Cease Work.
In spite of the optimistic tone of the Press and the Broadcasting Bulletins it is evident that the ever-increasing numbers of workers, who are leaving work and throwing in their lot with the Miners, is causing grave concern to the authorities.
The Printers' action in all centres is one of the most valuable assets to the workers' resist-

One of the Bulletins issued during the General Strike by the Communist Party in Yorkshire

Was this Power?

As the end of the first week of the General Strike came, the combined efforts of the mass and "flying" pickets became more apparent. Practically nothing could move without our permission. The prestige and authority of the Council of Action rose accordingly. Anything above a child's pram must carry *written* authority of the Council of Action.

From Newcastle had come the news that Sir Kingsley Wood, Government Civil Commissioner and General Montgomery, Head of OMS, had been compelled to seek a meeting with the leaders of the Regional Council of Action over the question of two destroyers and a submarine that had appeared in the Tyne.

Many of us felt this to be real working class power. Speculation and discussion developed as to when the General Council of the TUC would formally issue instructions to control all roads etc. For some of us of course, our ideas had been coloured by what we had read of that other country —the USSR—where the workers had set up *their* "Councils of Action"—the Soviets—and taken all power into their hands in 1917.

What we did not realise was the main difference that existed between them and us. In Soviet Russia the leadership of the movement had been won by a powerful Communist Party—the Bolsheviks—led by Lenin. In our country National leadership was still in the hands of Right-Wing Labour leaders whilst the very young Communist Party was still relatively weak (and still unsure as to its correct role in the Labour movement).

Betrayal

Therefore at this moment of our greatest confidence, when the strength of the strike movement was daily growing, the news came "the strike is off". This news was received with incredulity. At first many believed it was a trick "propaganda of the other side". It was only too true—May 13th—after nine days. At the very moment when the organisation and confidence of the mass movement had reached its peak, the TUC leaders had called it off.

The calling off the General Strike was seen by the miners as a great betrayal. It came at a moment when Councils of Action were beginning to feel the strength of their hurriedly organised strike machinery. In Durham it left the miners stunned but undefeated. The extent and depth of the fright which the General Strike had given to the Ruling Class was revealed in the savagery of the revenge and reprisals they proceeded to exact once they had got the strike called off and felt sure that once again they had matters firmly under their control.

For example, Will Lawther and Harry Bolton had been arrested during the strike and at Gateshead

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Court on Thursday, May 13th, they were fined £50 or two months hard labour. They elected to go to prison. The Chopwell Colliery Band had led a march from Chopwell some 15 miles away to Gateshead. They were joined by miners from High Spen, Blaydon and other villages. They had assembled peacefully outside the Court Room in the Gateshead Town Hall. They had come merely to demonstrate their solidarity with two popular leaders. After the sentence was known they passed over Gateshead High Street and were marching peacefully in organised procession along Askew Road away from Gateshead. Suddenly from the rear and down the steep side streets that lead on to Askew Road, the police charged with batons drawn. They were determined to teach these miners a "lesson". Taken completely unawares and unprepared, the men and women in the demonstration were scattered by the sheer weight and brutality of the onslaught. They learned a "lesson" alright but not the one the police and authorities behind them were trying to preach. The "lesson" learned was summed up in points made by the *Northern Light* when it said "the lowest aim in life is to be a policeman. When he dies he is so low he needs a ladder to climb up into Hell".

Reprisals

Ned Wilson of Rowlands Gill, a respected member of the Methodist Chapel was caught carrying copies of the *Northern Light*. He stood in the dock at Gateshead and listened with amazement to the solicitor—Mr. Frank Lambert—describing him as a terrorist—red in tooth and claw. It was the first time in his life that Ned had seen the inside of a Police Court but he had to stand and listen to Mr. Lambert declare he was being forced to close his offices by the "hostility of these people"—by inference Ned was responsible—then thunder as he read the above quotation from the *Northern Light*. Ned Wilson was sent to Durham jail for three months hard labour—the chairman saying that he regretted he could not add on an additional £100 fine.

Two brothers named Curry from High Spen were sentenced to six months. They were accused of being part of a "flying" picket. These cases were typical of the reprisals taken throughout Northumberland and Durham. The most savage sentence of all was inflicted on the eight Cramlington miners, who received eight years penal servitude. In order to prevent the movement of blackleg trains they broke the main railway line near their village—just north of Newcastle by the simple method of removing a section of the track. A tremendous propaganda effort was made to ensure a heavy sentence by lurid references to the dangers to life and limb etc. The fact remains that no-one was injured, but considerable alarm and uncertainty was created amongst the authorities and the few student blacklegs they had managed to recruit.

Those who, in the course of the General Strike had been sent to prison, were regarded as heroes, who, on their release were given a heroes' welcome.

The Communist Party

In the nine months prior to the General Strike, the numerically small Communist Party had alone urged that the workers should prepare to defend themselves against what the Government had in store for them. The right-wing and moderate leaders of the Labour movement counselled caution. "Don't provoke the Government" they said, "it will only make matters worse". In the General Strike itself the small Communist Party had been in the forefront of the struggle. They seemed to be the only ones not taken by surprise at the strength of the forces arrayed against the miners.

At this stage, the decisions of the 1924 and 1925 Labour Party Conferences, designed to isolate the Communists from other militant Labour Party supporters, were still in their infancy. When the Communist Party called meetings to discuss the General Strike, and made appeals for members, miners joined en masse. For example, at a mass meeting held in the football field at Chopwell, 250 miners and their wives joined the Party. At a later date, in the same village, when attempts were made to expel members of the Labour Women's Section because they had joined the Communist Party, the entire section left the Labour Party. They retained their name with the term, in brackets (Disaffiliated).

This experience in Chopwell was typical of what happened throughout Northumberland and Durham immediately after the collapse of the General Strike. The reason for this mass influx into the Communist Party arose from the very nature of developments both in the build up for, and the collapse of, the General Strike.

The Communist Party's estimation of the situation following "Red Friday" 1925, was extremely correct. It characterised the Baldwin Government's subsidy to the mine-owners as an attempt to buy a "breathing space". It highlighted the preparations that were being made to build up the OMS, the appointment of Civil Commissioners who, under the EPA would replace Local Authorities and act as virtual area dictators, whilst all so-called "responsible" TU and Parliamentary Labour Leaders were urging the movement to keep quiet and do nothing lest this might provoke the Government. The Communist Party, by public meetings and through their paper *Workers' Weekly* urged workers to build up their own alternative to the OMS and prepare to meet the challenge that "the wages of all workers must

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come down". The Government's reply was to arrest twelve leading members of the Party's EC and throw them into jail—some for twelve and some for six months. Their crime? Membership of the EC of the Communist Party. This only served to intensify the efforts of the Communists. They drew attention to the effectiveness of Councils of Action in the "Hands off Russia Campaign" in 1921 and called for their re-establishment.

Communists in the Coalfield

When the General Strike came, people like R. Page Arnot were in the forefront of the efforts to set up the Councils of Action, presenting a powerful alternative to Sir Kingsley Wood. With the collapse of the General Strike he, along with people like Isabel and Ernie Brown, and Alex Geddes, toured the towns and villages of Durham and Northumberland, reporting on the positive results of the strike. Every meeting was an appeal for members of the Communist Party, with results as stated above. In the days immediately following the end of the General Strike the Communist Party, with its newly added strength made a valuable contribution to the work of reforming the broken ranks and helping the miners in the task of fighting that important rearguard action that saved the Labour and Trade Union movement from utter defeat. The main feature of the Party's work on the North East in this period was a persistent campaign of outdoor meetings. Every weekend its team of 20 to 25 local speakers, unhampered with television, and of course without the help of such aids as "Public Address" outfits, would be out. Each speaker would address at least one and, in many cases, two public meetings on a Sunday.

During the ensuing struggle in the coalfields, the role of the Communist Party was mainly that of a propaganda force. It organised its own meetings, supplementing those organised officially by the Miners' Lodges. It gave full support to the mass meetings organised to hear the popular miners' leader, A. J. Cook, and everywhere raised the slogan "Not a penny off the pay; not a minute on the day". As the lock-out wore on, Communists brought a new feature into play. In villages where miners' wives had joined the Communist Party, they drew the womenfolk into active participation in the struggle. The women played a valuable part in many places in connection with attempts to introduce "blacklegs" into the pit. For example, in one village the Vicar's son, inspired by a strong feeling of patriotism, etc., had volunteered to work in the pit. This much-publicised event was carried out under heavy police guard. A strong body of miners' wives assembled near the entrance to the pit yard. They did not boo, nor make any attempt to interfere with the blackleg or his bodyguard. They merely surrounded them and moved off, very slowly, up the narrow road leading to the Vicarage, singing, with all the dignity of a funeral procession, such hymns as "Abide with Me", "Rock of Ages" and "Lead Kindly Light". As if by magic, a wreath appeared, borrowed from a recent grave in the nearby cemetery. This was placed round the neck of the "would-be miner".

This experience destroyed any desire on the part of the Vicar's son to become a miner. This, and similar happenings in the mining villages of Durham, were described as "terrorism", "interference with liberty and freedom". For example, during the 1926-27 period, it would have been foolhardy in the extreme for Tories to attempt to hold public meetings. Magistrates' Courts were much-used places for reading solemn lectures on public freedom and duties. These did not have much effect on the Durham mining population. It needs to be remembered that during the General Strike, and the long bitter struggle that followed, the miners were *not* on strike. They were *locked-out* by the coal-owners. In an effort to defend an already miserable standard of life, the miners were facing the worst form of "terrorism", i.e., the pressures of poverty and food shortages for their wives and children, in an effort to drive them back into the pits.

The Miners Struggle On

How was it that the Durham miners resisted so long in such a bitter struggle? They never regarded themselves as "heroes". First, the knowledge of what awaited them in the way of wages, hours and conditions, if they capitulated. Second, the knowledge of what it would mean to them if their greatest weapon, the Durham Miners' Association (always referred to as "the Union") was either crippled or destroyed. Without the "Union" the future would indeed be bleak. Thirdly, the experiences gained as to how to fight against hunger in the guerrilla lock-outs, prior to the General Strike. All these factors contributed to a class solidarity that had to be lived with to be understood. Nor were the miners' fears for the future unfounded as subsequent figures proved. For example, in 1928 productivity had increased by 3 cwts. per man-shift worked. In the same period costs per ton had dropped by 3/7d., of this 3/3d. was accounted for by reduced wage-costs. Nationally, the miners' wages had increased by 50 per cent over the 1914 figures, in 1928. But the official cost-of-living index had risen by 67 per cent.

The stubbornness of the miners against yielding to the demands of the coal-owners and the Government, was an embarrassment, not only to the Government, but also to those Labour and Trade Union leaders who had raised the cry "never

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again" and who, a year or more later, were to try to gain some sort of blessing for their discussions with Sir Alfred Mond for "Peace in Industry".

An effort was made to end the lock-out by what became known as "the Bishops' Memorandum". This in effect, was an effort to get the men back into the pits on the basis of accepting two cardinal points of the coal-owners' demands—District Agreements and Revised Wage Rates.

The Communists campaigned strongly against these proposals throughout the Durham coalfield. The main feature of their work was open-air meetings. These were held in villages throughout the County. The method of convening was similar to that used for calling Miners' Lodge meetings. A local Communist would cover the village, street by street, with bell or crake, announce details of time and place of the meeting, and invite all and sundry to attend.

Whilst they took care not to infringe on the highest authority in any Durham mining village—the Miners' Lodge meeting—the Communist Party campaign had a tremendous effect on the outcome of the discussions of the Bishops' proposals. The Durham Miners' Association joined the rest of the Miners Federation of Great Britain in rejecting them as a basis of settlement.

"Spencerism" Rejected

Another effort of the coal-owners to break the resistance of the miners and destroy their Durham Miners' Association (which came to nought) was the attempt to organise a non-political Union. The theory behind this was that, having established an organisation of this kind, it would receive formal recognition of the coal-owners, and replace the DMA. Such a move succeeded in the Notts coalfield, led by Mr. G. A. Spencer. It was ironical that Mr. Spencer, who at the 1925 Labour Party Conference had played a prominent part in splitting the Labour Movement when the Communists were expelled, should now be in the forefront of the move to split the ranks of the miners. In the Midland coalfield, Mr. Spencer managed to establish a "non-political" Union, which the miners in that area were unable to root out until 1937. It did irreparable damage to the miners in their struggle, but failed completely to gain a foothold in the Durham coalfield.

The attempt to introduce "Spencerism" (as it came to be known) into the Durham coalfield was by choosing a few places for special concentration. It was alleged that the effort had financial backing from the notorious Havelock Wilson, at that time leader of the National Union of Seamen. One unfortunate choice for concentration was Chopwell. True, the pit had stood idle for some eighteen months prior to the General Strike. Here, they must have reasoned, should be fertile soil to sow doubt and secure a breakaway. They had managed to get a handful of men to go into the pit, but the feeling was so hostile that the men had to be housed in what became known as "the Compound"—a few houses within the near confines of the colliery yard itself. This was under extraordinarily strong police guard, night and day.

After a suitable press campaign, a meeting was advertised to be held in the local "King's Cinema". The meeting was packed to overflowing. As soon as the Chairman rose to speak uproar broke loose. This continued for a time. As it died away, the Chairman tried again, but the roar rose to a crescendo. At the next lull, Jack Gilliland, local delegate to the DMA Council, stood on his seat and called for all present to leave the hall. Quietly and in orderly fashion, the hall emptied, except for the platform and a few colliery officials. The local Secretary of the Communist Party and two young YCLers received a Court summons for "disorderly conduct at a public meeting". But the attempt to form a branch of the "non-political Union" ended in fiasco.

Attempts made at other mining villages met with a similar fate. "Spencerism" may have had some success in the Notts area, but whatever the difficulties, the Durham Miners' Union "the Union" as it was called—remained sacred in the eyes of the Durham miners.

During the seven long months of struggle, the Government and coal-owners used every weapon possible against the miners. The Emergency Powers Act. used with such effect during the General Strike, was kept in being during the miners' lock-out. This was used in order to strengthen the main weapons of hunger and intimidation. The miners, schooled in the guerrilla lock-outs prior to the General Strike, also learned how to increase weapons in their armoury—the fight for existence was real and bitter.

Solidarity with the Miners

Negotiations between the miners and the Co-operative movement resulted in agreement for vast extensions of credit by the various retail Societies to the miners throughout the coalfield. Food vouchers were issued through the Lodges to their members. These, the local retail Society accepted. The Union undertook to guarantee repayment of such credit. The appeals for financial assistance had a mixed reception. Right-wing leaders were not very helpful. The outstanding campaign was waged by Dr. Marion Phillips. Using the miners' lamp as a symbol, the committee for the relief of miners' wives raised over £300,000.

In the trade unions the issue became a battle wherever a conference was held. The biggest effort

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came from the miners of the USSR. They raised—despite their own poverty—a gift of one million pounds. This aroused the Tories to the heights of rage and fury. "Moscow Gold" they taunted. This taunt had not the slightest effect on the miners in the Durham coalfield. The generous gift of the Russian miners, plus the rage of their arch-enemies —the Tories—simply helped to highlight the unselfish work of Communists and militant miners generally. It also helped to strengthen the bonds of solidarity between the miners of the two countries. This was reflected a year later, when Will Lawther and Councillor Harry Bolton led a delegation from the North-East to the USSR. Accommodation for the Secretary of the Committee organising the delegation was provided at Burt Hall, Newcastle. The appeal for nominations of delegates, and donations to finance the delegates, met with instant and generous response from the Miners' Lodges in Durham. The mass delegation, led by Will Lawther, became a massive demonstration of solidarity between the miners of both countries.

The miners not only campaigned for financial aid within the Labour movement. Throughout the country every effort was made to secure Poor Law assistance. Communist and militant Labour speakers alike, brushed aside with contempt any talk of "stigma" or "disgrace" in appealing to the "Board of Guardians" as it was called then, for help. It was ruled that no assistance could be given to miners, because they were involved in a trade dispute. Despite the stringent conditions imposed, miners everywhere were encouraged to apply for assistance for wives and children, and this they did. It all helped in the fight against the starvation weapon.

The Plender Award

There was a limit, however, to the resistance the miners could put up, particularly when not only themselves, but the women and children were also victims.

The breakaway in the Notts coalfield received tremendous national publicity. The Baldwin Government had repealed the Seven-hour Day Act of 1919. District Agreements were imposed on the miners. In Durham, the agreement known as the Plender Award (named after its chief arbitrator) was bitterly resisted by the Communists. They warned of the way in which the coal-owners would use it as a means of further depressing wage rates.

However, the end of this epic struggle was at hand.

The Plender Award was eventually accepted and the lock-out came to an end. The correctness of the Communists' emphasis on the dangers inherent in the Plender Award was reflected in the number of pit disputes that followed in 1927-29. One of the bitterest of these was the Dawdon Pit dispute at the beginning of 1929. Here the miners held out for fifteen weeks against a wage cut of 3/- per shift.

After the Strike

In the period immediately following the General Strike the Communists had a distinct increase, both in influence and numerical strength. This included some of the most militant forces amongst the miners, and as a result, had quite an influence on the character of the Durham miners' rearguard action after the collapse of the General Strike, and the stubborn pit struggle of the next two years. For example, the Communists were the spearhead of the movement for free meals for schoolchildren. They were in the forefront of those who poured scorn on the old ideas of it being a "disgrace" to apply for Poor Law Relief. Instead, in their public meetings, they endeavoured to show their colleagues what they could claim, and what they should fight for. A favourite method in the campaign for school meals was to cover a village with street meetings, street by street. This was a hard and painstaking job, but it effectively combated Tory propaganda in both press and wireless, and won wide support, particularly amongst the miners' wives, not only on school meals, but also on a whole variety of questions.

The work of the Party in this period, on Tyneside and the Northumberland and Durham coalfields, will always remain as examples of the Party's endeavour to work in a way that kept it close to the workers and their trade union movement. Everything it did was closely linked with a ceaseless and persistent propaganda campaign. C. R. Woods of Blaydon was the Party's propaganda secretary—unemployed and therefore virtually full-time (unpaid). He pressed into service any who showed either desire or nerve to speak in public. These comrades he fed with facts and ideas. New starters were given their baptism as "second speaker"—on Sunday mornings at Newcastle Quayside, and Sunday nights in the Newcastle Bigg Market. From this they graduated to mining villages for regular weekend meetings. Communist speakers were familiar faces on "signing-on" days at every Labour Exchange. The Gateshead Rail Shops were a regular weekly pitch. Charlie Woods kept his panel of 20-25 local speakers busy week in, week out, without fail. A Birtley comrade once complained bitterly that he was being ignored—he had only spoken at three meetings in the previous month.

As indicated above, the Party took an active part in the struggle on a whole variety of issues affecting the daily lives of our people. Whether it be a strike, an eviction, or the fight for school milk, there one would find the Communists involved.

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Such comrades as Billy Hall, Birtley, George Lumley, Ryhope, Sam Cotterill, Blaydon, Bill Donaldson, Newcastle, and a host of others were all closely linked with these activities. It was not simply the work they did in the late '20's but the efforts of these comrades laid the basis, and prepared the cadres, who were later to make a mark for the Party on the problems of unemployment and the fight against Fascism in the early '30's.

It must be said that the Durham coal-owners did not try to make the same distinction between Communist and non-Communist militants, which the right-wing Labour leaders had started to make in 1924-25. No-one was safe. The colliery owners appeared to work on the principle that all militants were either Communist, or potential Communists.

The fact that the pit had stood idle for seven months and for a period of this time without even safety men, meant that the pits could not resume full production immediately. This presented the colliery owners with a heaven-sent opportunity to wreak their vengeance on the most outstanding local leaders, and at the same time to weed out those miners whose advancing age was making them less able to maintain the extra effort demanded of the younger men. Efforts were made of course, to combat the worst evils of this policy, but the owners could, and did, keep a section of the pit closed, in order to avoid having to start someone they wanted to keep out.

After many months of idleness and frustration, many of the miners, particularly the younger men, quietly left the Durham coalfield to seek jobs in other mining areas where they were not known.

From late 1927 to 1928 the Yorkshire and Kent coalfields became known as places where one could get a start without too many questions being asked. After a period, many of these "exiles" from Durham began again to make their contribution towards the struggle of the miners. Eddie Lawther, who left Chopwell and in later years became a prominent miners' leader in Kent, was a case in point.

The Communist Party gained tremendous experience as a result of its participation in these momentous struggles. Experiences that were to serve it in good stead and prepare the Party for sharp struggles yet to come in the early '30s. Yet, despite such a splendid record of service to the Labour movement and the working class generally, it was unable to retain the exceptional increase in membership gained in the second half of 1926. There is no single answer to this question. The reason has to be sought in a combination of factors. First the working class movement had received a serious set-back. Many of the new members bore the brunt of the savage reprisals already referred to. Secondly, the right-wing labour leadership, armed with the splitting decisions of the 1924 and 1925 Labour Party Conferences, sought to deepen the split and further isolate the Communists particularly in the trade unions. With heartfelt cries of "Never again", the right-wing in 1927 sought, in talks between the TUC and a group of employers led by Sir Alfred Mond, to establish "Industrial Peace". The Communists were bitter opponents of these efforts. Thirdly, inside the Communist Party itself, a sharp internal struggle developed around the question of the role it must play in the Labour Movement. Since its formation, the Party had in the main been a propaganda body. The question was now raised of it becoming an independent political force with its own daily newspaper and its own independent candidates for local and Parliamentary elections. These were some of the factors responsible for the loss of the exceptional membership gains of 1926.

In 1921 the miners nationally, had suffered a heavy defeat after a three months' stubborn resistance. From 1926 to 1928 they faced again the terrific hammer-blows of both the coal-owners and the Tory Government.

These set-backs and defeats strengthened rather than weakened their hatred and distrust both of the coal-owners and their loyal servant—the Tory Party. It is a tragedy of history that right-wing Labour leaders have been able, time and again, to canalise this healthy class outlook into channels not always beneficial to the best interests of the miners themselves. But the final chapter has not yet been written. With the growth and development of a strong Communist Party, the miners in Durham, as elsewhere, will again advance to the forefront of working class struggle.

Note: It is very much regretted that for technical reasons, it has been found impossible to include Peter Kerrigan's article—'The Party in the Industrial Struggle' in this number. It will appear in the November issue. Editor.

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The Communist Party and The War in Spain

Nan Green*

"The struggle in Spain is the world at the crossroads. The signs are clearly pointed—democracy and peace, or fascism and war. That is the issue. Let us respond. Let the people of Britain, with our democratic traditions, our present liberties, our power and strength, rise as one man in defence of Spanish democracy, now fighting for us as surely as they are fighting for themselves".

(Harry Pollitt in *International Press Correspondence*, August 8th, 1936).

The movement in support of the Spanish people's fight against fascism in 1936-1939 was without any doubt the most widespread movement of international solidarity ever seen in Britain up to that time. It united the most diverse sections of the British people and left a mark on the labour movement which is still perceptible today.

That this was so is irrefutably due to the ceaseless work of our Party in mobilising and warning against the menace of fascism and war, and its leadership and example in the many-sided campaign that became known as the "aid Spain movement." While the dominant section of our ruling class pursued a policy of striving for agreement with the fascist dictators and making concessions to them in the hope that the armed forces of Hitler Germany, in particular, would be launched eastwards in a "crusade" against the Soviet Union; while the right-wing leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC were more occupied in waging a battle against their own left wing and against communism (numerically small though the Communist Party was then) than with mobilising their members for militant action against the fascist menace,[1] our Party strove, mobilised and battled with all its might to alert people to the danger that threatened and, when Franco's rebellion, aided by Hitler and Mussolini, brought that danger ominously nearer, to rally the support of the whole people to the Spanish people's side.

Thus when the military rebellion broke out in Spain on July 18th, 1936, there already existed in Britain a broadly-based organisation, formed on the initiative of our Party, the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism, which had done much to arouse public opinion to the threatening danger. Outstanding among its activities had been the holding in London of an international legal enquiry into the Reichstag Fire trial; its fight for the lives of Ernst Thälmann, Edgar André and other German anti-fascists; the sending of a delegation to Brazil to intervene on behalf of the Communist leader Luis Carlos Prestes; and its actions on behalf of the Asturian miners in Spain in 1934.

First Acts of Solidarity

The existence and lively activity of the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism made it possible to move quickly in support of the Spanish people. The Committee initiated a meeting which formed the Spanish Medical Aid Committee. The first British ambulance unit, with its accompanying doctors, nurses and other medical personnel, left London on August 10th, less than four weeks after the start of the rebellion and ten days after the formation of the committee which sent it. A continuous stream of ambulances, medical supplies and personnel was sent by this committee right up to the end of the war.

Meanwhile the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism sent a delegation to Spain to investigate the role of German and Italian fascism, whose help to the rebel generals was being blankly denied by the Conservative government. The delegation, consisting of two Labour MP's, one Labour member of the House of Lords and one Communist, brought back to England copious evidence in the form of German bombs, Italian parachutes, the military books of captured Italian conscripts and other equipment, which was presented to the Labour Party Conference at Edinburgh in September 1936. (The Government continued to claim that there was "no evidence" of foreign intervention in the Spanish civil war).

* Nan Green has been Secretary of the International Brigade Association for many years and herself served with the Medical Services in Spain during 1937-1938.

[1] It will be recalled that Herbert Morrison's best advice to Labour Party members who encountered Mosley's Blackshirts was—to shout "Mickey Mouse[4]"

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A wider committee was next formed—the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, which brought together the organisations that were springing up, in most instances on the initiative of Communists, in every part of the country. It consisted of people from every political party, from the trade union movement, from various religious denominations and from existing committees. Its Chairman was the Conservative Duchess of Atholl, its joint Secretaries a Labour, a Liberal and a Conservative member of Parliament. In the interest of the broadest possible unity of action, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief never asked its constituent members for a formal declaration of support for the Spanish Republican Government, agreement being founded on the proposal to send aid "where the need was greatest". Members of our Party, always in a minority on national and most local committees to aid Spain, adhered to this agreement and did not press for the adoption by them of the Party's political programme, for which they worked outside the broad "aid Spain" movement, as will be shown.

When the attack came on the Basque country, the British people opened their doors to 4,000 Basque children, forcing the unwilling Government to admit these small refugees from fascist terror-bombing. A miracle of voluntary organisation transformed bare fields outside Southampton into a well-equipped transit camp from which the children were sent to the various homes organised to welcome them by Trades Councils, religious bodies, trade unions, private individuals and "Basque Children's Committees", which continued to exist as long as there was need for them. (Over half the children returned to their homes and parents in 1939; the remainder—orphans, or those with one or both parents in prison—continued in this country and many grew up here).

Food and Medicine

Within a few hours of the arrival of the refugees from Catalonia across the Pyrenees into France in 1939, a British committee had set up its headquarters in Perpignan to bring aid and relief to the French camps where they were interned. In June 1939 the ss "Sinaia", chartered by the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, sailed for Mexico with some 1,200 Spaniards aboard, whole families having been reunited by careful search through the French camps.

In all, over £2 million worth of cash and goods were contributed to help the Spanish people. Streams of food and medical supplies were driven across France and over the Pyrenees; 29 foodships sailed into Spanish ports, not counting the commercial vessels which continued to trade with Spain despite the fascist blockade. And this, remember, despite the fact that there were *over two million unemployed* in Britain at that time, many of whom contributed from their own meagre resources to help the people in Spain.

It is difficult to begin mentioning names in an article of this necessarily brief kind, because so many deserve remembrance and honour. But if there is one name that stands out indelibly in the whole chronicle of the broad "aid Spain" movement—the humanitarian aspect of the total picture—it is that of Isabel Brown, tireless organiser, magnificent platform speaker[2], forthright agitator, whose audiences never left a meeting without knowing exactly what had to be done and feeling genuinely inspired to go out and do it.

"Arms for Spain"

But food, clothing, medical supplies, ambulances were only part of what the Spanish people needed. Their greater need was for *arms*—arms to repel the German and Italian invaders who poured in tanks, guns, aeroplanes, ammunition, oil and *conscripted troops* (to the number of 200,000 officers and other ranks)[3] to assist the rebels; arms which they had the right, in international law, to purchase, but which were denied them by the shameful policy of "non-intervention." "Arms for Spain!" was a *political* slogan and here again our Party, and particularly the *Daily Worker* played a leading role in mobilising the struggle.

From the very beginning of the Spanish war the rebel generals, representing the forces of reaction and class privilege in Spain, enjoyed the warm support of the corresponding forces in Britain. In the House of Commons these forces were represented by a massive Conservative majority which at no time during the Spanish war was seriously threatened. A figure like the Duchess of Atholl, who was prepared to go against the stream and jeopardise her political career in the Conservative ranks in the name of justice and decency, was an exception in the circles in which she moved.

The Farce of "Non-intervention"

On the strength of the support of some renegade Labour and Liberal MP's, the Governments of Baldwin and Chamberlain claimed to be "National"

[2] A newspaper columnist of the day named Isabel Brown and Lady Violet Bonham-Carter as the two foremost women orators of the time.

[3] Italy admitted having sent 150,000. Germany sent 50,000—of whom Hitler decorated 26,113 for "meritorious conduct" in the Spanish War. There were, further, some 100,000 North African mercenaries fighting on Franco's side. The entire total of foreign *volunteers* who fought on the Republican side in the International Brigades was no more than 35,000 from 54 countries.

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and flaunted the "National" label while they were engaged in betraying the national interest and dragging the nation's honour in the mire. While they did their best to strangle the Spanish Republic in the noose of "Non-intervention" they claimed to be neutral. Some reactionary MP's, however, inspired by fervent feelings of class solidarity, disregarded the figleaf of "neutrality" and openly proclaimed their support for Franco.

Sir Henry Page Croft, for instance, said on March 23rd, 1938: "I recognise General Franco to be a gallant Christian gentleman, and I believe his word." Speaking at the same London meeting, Captain Victor Cazalet described Franco as "the Leader of our cause today."

"I hope to God Franco wins in Spain, and the sooner the better," exclaimed Sir Arnold Wilson (who is also on record as having said: "I have met Hitler repeatedly. I believe him to be a great instrument of peace in the world.")

Innumerable other examples could be given of the Conservatives' devotion to the "gallant Christian gentleman" who drowned Spain in blood. Churchill referred to this sympathy when he wrote at the end of 1938: "Nothing strengthened the Prime Minister's (i.e. Chamberlain's) hold upon well-to-do society more remarkably than the belief that he is friendly to General Franco and the Nationalist cause in Spain".

The dominant section of the ruling class regarded the activities of the "Non-intervention" committee as a cover for the policy which was to culminate at Munich, as a big camouflage operation—a fact which Prince Bismarck, Germany's Chargé d'Affaires in London, was able to perceive at the committee's very first meeting. "Today's meeting", he wrote, "left the impression that with France and England, the two powers principally interested in the committee, it is not so much a question of taking actual steps immediately as of pacifying the aroused feelings of the leftist parties in both countries by the very establishment of such a committee."

Appeasement of Fascism

The policy of bogus neutrality was put across to the British people with the big lie that it was a policy of peace, that the only alternative was a European war. With this argument, Parliament and people were expected to swallow the massive, and ever more open intervention of Italy and Germany in Spain, the sinking of British merchant ships carrying goods and foodstuffs to Spain, the growing threat to British communications in the Mediterranean and the pro-Franco actions of the Government, which became increasingly blatant as the Spanish war reached its conclusion.

It was a policy that brought the Government, and Chamberlain himself, to the depths of degradation and infamy, as is exemplified in the diary of Count Ciano, Mussolini's Foreign Minister and son-in-law, in the following entry for January 27th, 1939, shortly after the fascist troops had entered Barcelona: "Lord Perth has submitted for our approval the outline of the speech which Chamberlain will make before the House of Commons in order that we may suggest any changes, if necessary. The Duce (i.e. Mussolini) approved it, and commented: 'I believe this is the first time that the head of the British Government has submitted to a foreign government the outline of one of his speeches. It's a bad sign for them.' "

The Party's Call

But our Party—and for that matter the working class of this country—did not need to await the publication of diaries and memoirs of foreign statesmen to know what was going on. In his report to the 14th Congress of the Communist Party on May 29th, 1937, Harry Pollitt said:

> "The National Government's attitude towards the legally-elected Spanish Government has sullied the name of Britain throughout the world . . . It was the first Government to refuse Spanish warships the right to coal and refuel at Gibraltar, the first to deny the Spanish Government the right to buy arms. It brought pressure to bear upon the French Government to take a similar attitude and to sponsor the policy of so-called 'non-intervention'. It has allowed London to be the seat from which Franco's agents have issued their pernicious propaganda. It has refused to allow the accredited representatives of the Spanish people to state their case before the British people . . . The National Government eagerly accepted the lies of Franco and his story that the entrance to Bilbao was mined and that foodships for the starving could not enter. They placed every obstacle in the way of removing the Basque children from the devilish work of the fascist airmen. It was the first Government to make it illegal for anti-fascist volunteers to go to the assistance of the Spanish government. It has refused to apply the machinery and Covenant of the League of Nations against the declared aggressors".

United Campaigns

This was one side, but one side only, of the forces against which the Communist Party had to rally the people of Britain. Millions of British people, including practically the whole of the working class movement, wanted the Spanish people to win, recognised the class character of the war, and saw with clear vision that the bombs which fell on Barcelona, Guernica and Malaga were a rehearsal for London, Clydebank and Coventry. Alongside of them were the majority of the intellectuals, who saw the menace which fascism

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presented to their interests and to the whole fabric of European culture. Religious bodies recognised the fascist threat to religious freedom and were moved by humanitarian sentiments to help the sufferers. Many liberals came forward to help in defence of bourgeois liberalism, and some Conservatives in defence of Britain's trading interests.[4]

It was a vast army, potentially an invincible army, the working class movement and an unprecedented range of allies. But it was cursed with *vacillating generals*—the Labour leaders, to whom the very idea of militant action, of unity with the Communists, was abhorrent.

When the Trades Union Congress met in September 1936, it did not discuss the mobilisation of the anti-fascist forces in support of the Spanish people. On the contrary, one of the main items on its Agenda was a discussion on a document entitled: "The British Labour Movement and Communism—an Exposure of Communist Manoeuvres."

On January 18th, 1937, the Socialist League (consisting of left-wing members of the Labour Party), the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party announced that they were going to launch a united campaign. On January 27th, the Socialist League was expelled from the Labour Party.

Right Wing Betrayal

The British Government, as we have seen, brought pressure to bear on the French Government to ensure the carrying out of the "Non-intervention" policy. The right wing Labour leaders excused their own prolonged support for that policy by pointing to that ornament of the international working class movement, Leon Blum, who was described by Walter Citrine, then General Secretary of the TUC, as "a socialist, a man of proved international repute, of courage and broadmindedness, of intelligent understanding." This paragon had decided not to supply arms to the Spanish Republic. "The French government," said Citrine, "was convinced—and I would remind you that governments have many sources of information that are not open to other organisations—and had concluded that if they went on supplying Spain in this emergency with the munitions that the Spanish Government needed there would in all probability be an outbreak of war in Europe."

Speaking on the same occasion—the 1936 Congress of the TUC—Ernest Bevin argued that a vote against "Non-intervention" might help to bring about the fall of the Blum government.

Not until July 27th, 1937, did the National Council of Labour finally dissociate itself officially from "Non-intervention."[5] But even when, at the 1937 TUC, resolutions were passed which reflected to some extent the sentiments of the rank and file, the right-wing leaders were not unduly perturbed since the implementation, or rather the non-implementation of these resolutions was in their hands. The many proposals for industrial action of one kind or another—protest strikes, refusal to handle goods destined for the Franco zone and so forth—were rejected by the right-wing leadership as "impracticable".

Quick on the Mark

Contrast with this the clear and instantaneous call issued by our Party. Two days after the revolt broke out in Spain, the leading article in the *Daily Worker* concluded:

> Too many people have believed that when the black-shirted swashbuckler starts his business, all the force is on his side. The Popular Front in Spain has shown the world that in the forces of democracy there lies the power to defeat the attack . . . Let support be active and prompt! And let all sections of the anti-fascist movement unite in giving it!

Five days later the paper was calling for support for a Sunday rally in Trafalgar Square.

> All into action now! Defend the Spanish Republic! Let us organise a mighty united movement of solidarity with the Spanish people . . . Demand that the National Government shall provide the people's government of Spain with the oil and coal and food supplies they need. Demand an end to the false neutrality that only conceals support for the fascists!

Within ten days of the uprising, a pamphlet had been written by Emile Burns, printed and put on sale—yes! all in ten days. It reached a record sale of 130,000.

Within 13 days, the *Daily Worker* reported an evening march to Fleet Street, where hundreds of people surrounded the *Daily Mail* shouting "Stop Press lies against Spain!" while J. R. Campbell talked to the printworkers inside and Joe Scott of the Amalgamated Engineering Union interviewed the Mail's Editor.

On August 5th a demonstration marched to the Italian Embassy shouting "Stop Italian guns for Spanish fascists!"

[4] A separate Committee of British Shipowners Trading to Spain was formed to combat the Government's refusal to protect British shipping; these shipowners bought a whole page of advertising space in *The Times* to protest against the policy of "Non-intervention".

[5] To be fair, it should be mentioned that it had by then launched a fund to give (non-military) aid to the Spanish people.

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Some of the men of the British Battalion, International Brigade.

Week after week, day after day the actions went on. By the time the 14th Congress of our Party met (in May 1937) the report of the Central Committee showed that the Party by then had "sold more than 320,000 of four pamphlets, distributed 6½ million leaflets, led repeated mass protests before the Italian and German Embassies, to 10 Downing Street and Transport House. Through the Spanish Fund directed by Comrade Pollitt, no less than £16,000 has been sent by the people of Britain, and we can further record that over £2,000 has gone to the National Council of Labour's Spanish Fund from Communist Party branches, districts and the Central Committee . . . (The Party) has also been able to *assist in the obtaining of many forms of vital military supplies* to be placed at the disposal of the Spanish people." (My italics. NG)

The Campaign Develops

The Spanish people fought for 986 days. And throughout the whole period our Party was in action. Great demonstrations, meetings and marches were organised. Engineers, printworkers and others straight from their factories marched down Whitehall demanding "Arms for Spain!"—not once but many times. Traffic at Piccadilly Circus was held up by people demonstrating the same demand. Great crowds gathered in Trafalgar Square and in other cities; thousands of meetings, large and small, were held up and down the country at street corners, in people's homes, in church and school halls. Door to door collections yielded money, tins of milk, clothing, blankets and all kinds of aid. Giant banners were painted by local artists and carried through the streets, demanding "Food, Freedom, Arms for Spain!" One hundred and forty eight noted writers "Took Sides" on the question posed to them by a group, which included Nancy Cunard, Ivor Montagu, Pablo Neruda, Jean Richard Bloch: "Are you for or against the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for or against Franco?" The published result[6] showed only 12 who declared themselves "neutral" and five who came out definitely on Franco's side.

And all the while the Party continued to press for its major political demands, formulated at the 14th Congress:

—respect for International Law
—restoration to Republican Spain of freedom of trade

[6] Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War", *Left Review*. The shortest contribution came from Samuel Beckett: "UPTHEREPUBLIC!"

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—withdrawal of Italian and German troops
—withdrawal of German and Italian ships which are blockading the Republican coast
—application of sanctions against the fascist aggressors by the League of Nations in accordance with the League Covenant.

And yet the Government remained unmoved. . . .

After it was over, on May 29th, 1939, the Labour Party met for its annual Conference, where the Executive put forward a resolution expressing "undying admiration for the heroic Spanish people", condemning the British Government for supporting the rebels and urging the whole Labour movement "to continue unremittingly their efforts to aid the Spanish people in Spain and elsewhere. . . ." An amendment was put forward which said in part: "This Conference . . . deplores that the National Executive Committee failed to utilise the great resources of the movement to bring effective aid to the people of Spain, and that it made little serious effort to rally the nation or to challenge by determined action the Government's betrayal of the Spanish Republic." The mover of the amendment, J. Poole, told the Conference: "Those of us who have been tied up with the Spanish struggle for the last two and a half years cannot allow that the conscience of the Party shall be finally appeased, or that the sacrifices of the Spanish people shall be written off, in a Resolution and a few complacent paragraphs of the Executive's report."

The seconder of the amendment, Sybil Wingate (sister of Wingate of Burma) spoke even more sharply: "Lord Halifax has told us recently that the Government has no Spanish blood on its hands. . . . We know what to think of Pontius Pilate, but what are we to say of ourselves, of our Movement, of our National Executive who by their betrayal during the first terrible year, and their obstinate refusal to take any effective action worthy of the situation afterwards, have cost us the key position in the fight against fascism and sacrificed the lives of so many of our best and bravest comrades?"

The First Volunteers

It is not too much to say that the honour of the British labour movement was vindicated by the men and women who went to Spain to fight alongside their heroic Spanish brothers and sisters. No full record exists of the political affiliations of the 2,000-odd volunteers who joined the British Battalion, though at least 400 were members of the Communist Party, and of the 406 names written in the incomplete Roll of Honour[7] drawn up early in 1939, 175 were members of the Party and 29 of the Young Communist League.

The first British life to be given for Spanish freedom was that of Felicia Browne, a young artist and a member of our Party. This courageous girl was in Barcelona at the beginning of the revolt and immediately joined the People's Militia. She was shot on August 25th, 1936, while rescuing a wounded comrade after her patrol, engaged in a night operation on the Aragon front, had been attacked and outnumbered by the enemy.

First move to organise a group of British volunteers was initiated by Nat Cohen and Sam Masters, two young London clothing workers, both Communists, who were on a cycling holiday in France at the time of the revolt and at once crossed into Spain. In Barcelona they founded the "Tom Mann Centuria" from among the handful of Britishers who had begun to arrive, along with anti-fascists from a score of other countries in a spontaneous urge to help the men and women who had placed their living bodies between democracy and fascism. When news came of the gathering of international volunteers at Albacete, this group, now numbering 18 men, went to the newly formed base and were attached to the Thälmann Battalion. A dozen other Britishers who had by this time reached Albacete formed a machine-gun group who were enrolled in a French Battalion. Both these groups took part in the defence of Madrid three months before the formation of the British Battalion was completed, and went on to fight at Cordoba. By the end of January 1937, 26 of these early volunteers had given their lives; the dead included John Cornford, Ralph Fox, Lorrimer Birch, Christopher Caudwell, all outstanding intellectuals, Joe Gough, unemployed worker from Luton, and "Tich"—formerly a regular soldier in the British Army.

The Communist International met [in September 1936,] and it was decided to issue a call for the formation of International Brigades. When this call was transmitted through our Party, the entire Secretariat of the London District Committee volunteered; not all were permitted, of course, to go at the time; D. F. Springhall, the London District Organiser, became the British Battalion's first political commissar. Before the end of the war, five of the Party's District Organisers had been released to go to Spain.

The British Battalion

Recruiting—through a separate office set up by the Party—was carried on more or less openly until January 9th, 1937, when the Government decided to make the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870 applicable to Spain, and threatened those guilty of an offence under this act with imprisonment up to two years, or a fine, or both.

Still more difficulty arose when the "Non-intervention" Committee on February 20th, enforced its ban on volunteers and announced a

[7] Almost 100 were still listed as missing.

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system of control. But these obstacles only made the British more determined. A weekend ticket to Paris permitted exit from this country and into France without a passport. They set out as "tourists", went to Paris, then crossed the Pyrenees on foot or made the journey by sea, sometimes in small open boats.

During November and December 1936, nearly 500 British volunteers arrived in Spain, and by the end of the year sufficient had been trained to form an English-speaking company, this historic step towards the formation of the English Battalion was completed just before Christmas Day 1936. No. 1 Company, as it came to be known, set off, 145 strong, for the Cordoba front with the 12th (French) Battalion of the 14th Brigade on December 24th. Commander of the Company was Captain George Nathan, a former British Army officer, who was subsequently promoted to the staff of the 15th Brigade and was killed at Brunete in July 1937; its Political Commissar was Ralph Fox, who lost his life in the battle for Lopera.

After nearly a month's fighting, No. 1 Company —by this time only 67 strong—returned to the base at Madrigueras, where the work of training and organising the new recruits was going on steadily. It will be recalled that Britain at the time did not have compulsory military service; only a small proportion of our volunteers (mostly veterans of the first world war) had any military training or experience, and, anxious as they were to get to the front lines, they were needed to help in the training of the younger men. Tom Wintringham, who took over the command at this base when Wilfred Macartney was accidentally wounded, had been in the RAF. The Royal Navy contributed the experience of D. F. Springhall who, with Peter Kerrigan, played a leading part in the organisation of the Battalion. Sam Wild, who started as Battalion armourer and year later became Battalion Commander, also came from the Royal Navy as did Fred Copeman who commanded the British Battalion at Brunete.

By the end of January the British Battalion, six hundred strong and composed of four Companies and auxiliary units, was organised and ready. It was incorporated into the newly formed 15th Brigade along with the Franco-Belge, Dimitrov and American Battalions. With the two first named, it went into battle at Jarama in February.

Battle of Jarama

On February 12th-14th, 1937, the British Battalion underwent its "baptism of fire", in position between two of the advancing fascist columns which were converging on Madrid. By the morning of the second day its numbers had been reduced to 225, including a machine-gun company and the Battalion staff. During the first half of that day it repelled a fascist attempt to advance on the ridge it was holding. Later, the Moors broke through on the Battalion's right flank and the entire machine-gun company was captured. Shortly afterwards the Battalion Commander was carried off with a wound in his thigh. The men struck tenaciously to the sunken road that was their front line. On the morning of the 14th they were still there, exhausted, hungry, but holding on. Commanded now by Jock Cunningham, they prepared to attack, but were surprised by enemy tanks, followed by Moorish troops. Without anti-tank guns or hand grenades, small groups continued to fight on, but soon the tanks were on the sunken road, the Republican line began to retreat. But then the retreating troops rallied. With Cunningham at their head, the 140 British survivors marched back to their positions. The line was held again. By nightfall, the men who had been routed a few hours before, settled down on the ground they had recaptured.

Nearly a quarter of the British who gave their lives in Spain fell in the battle of Jarama. February 14th, was the high peak of the fascist offensive in that sector. The British continued in action until February 27th, when the Republican forces, attacking along the entire front, finally brought the battle to a close. General Francisco Franco, who had been boasting to the world that he would enter Madrid on a white charger on New Year's Day 1937, was obliged to wait over two years longer. . . .

It would take too long to describe in detail the whole of the actions in which the British volunteers took part.[8] Inscribed on the richly-embroidered silk banner which was presented to the Battalion by the women of Barcelona are the names: Cordova, Jarama, Brunete, Belchite, Saragossa, Teruel, Gandesa road, The Ebro, the major battles in which the British Battalion engaged. At Brunete, in July 1937, Major George Nathan was Chief of Operations, Jock Cunningham was in command of three of the six Battalions of the 15th Brigade. It was in this battle that Nathan was killed, as also were Bob Elliott, a Communist Councillor from Durham, Bill Meredith, one of the heroes of Jarama, Alex McDade of Glasgow (who wrote the words of the song "Jarama" which is still the song of the Battalion) and George Brown, a leading Communist from Manchester. A few weeks later, now under the command of Paddy O'Daire with Arthur Ollerenshaw (a former pilot in the RAF) as his Adjutant, the British took part in the capture of Quinto and Belchite, being given the task of defending Mediana, ten miles north

[8] The story is told in *Britons in Spain*, by Bill Rust, published in 1939 by Lawrence & Wishart.

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of Belchite, in order to hold back a fascist force marching to the relief of the besieged city.

In October, together with the other three Battalions of the 15th Brigade, the British Battalion was in the lines facing Fuentes del Ebro, where they lost their Commander, Harold Fry and their Commissar, Eric Whaley, fresh from England. Proudly inscribed in the records of the 15th Brigade is a copy of the telegram sent by the Commander of the Army of the East to General Walter (Swierchewski), Commander of the 35th Division:

> "I send my most enthusiastic congratulations to all the commanders, officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of that brave Division, and especially to yourself and the 11th and 15th Brigades for the heroism and fighting spirit shown in the brilliant action of the taking of Quinto . . . an episode of great importance for the triumph of our cause".

Visits to the Battalion

Throughout its time in Spain, the British Battalion received visits from a whole number of delegations and notable people from this and other countries: Leah Manning, William Dobbie, Edith Summerskill, Clement Attlee, then leader of the Labour Party (a Company of the Battalion was given his name) and many other Labour people; Jawaharlal Nehru paid a visit to the Battalion about this time; Paul Robeson sang for them; the *Volunteer for Liberty* (the Brigades' newspaper) for August 13th, 1938, contains photographs of a delegation of British students which visited the 15th Brigade: one of the captions reads "Top, right, Edward Heath, Conservative student, speaks to the men of the British Battalion."

More than any other, however, the several visits of our own Harry Pollitt brought inspiration and cheer to the British lads. Harry was the soul of the movement back in England to support the men in Spain and to take care of their families; the Party itself sent seven ambulances to the British Battalion, medical instruments, a field kitchen, tons of foodstuffs, medical supplies, half a million cigarattes, newspapers, books, radio sets, gramophones, chessmen; the Dependants' Aid Committee raised over £50,000 to care for the families and help those who were disabled. Harry Pollitt brought not only material comfort, but with his well remembered political clarity and gumption, his warm concern for individuals and his infectious confidence gave renewed inspiration to all who heard him. William Gallacher, too, went from England to visit the British boys, and John Gollan, representing the Young Communist League.

More Battles

The town of Teruel was taken from the fascists by Spanish troops on December 22nd, 1937. In the first days of January 1938 the British Battalion, commanded by Bill Alexander, began a period of service in its defence which was to last three months, marking some of its most heroic actions but costing the lives of more valiant men. On the evening of January 20th, the Commander of the 5th Army Corps, Juan Modesto, specially commended the British Battalion on its stand and Bill Alexander was promoted on the field to the rank of Captain.

Less than a month later the Battalion was again commended by the Army Corps Commander for successfully routing superior enemy forces near Segura de los Banos. Bill Alexander was seriously wounded here, and Sam Wild became Commander of the Battalion.

Marching towards Belchite in the early hours of March 10th, the Battalion entered an olive grove some 2 kilometers north of the town, where they found themselves under heavy machine-gun and artillery fire. They held on until they were literally blasted out; Sam Wild ordered each Company to march down the road and take up positions for covering the retreat. During their retreat through the dead town, the British took up positions five times and held back the enemy; the last of the Republican forces to leave the town were 90 British lads who kept up their resistance to the last moment. On March 15th, they fought a heavy rearguard action, in the course of which, due to the difficulty of telling friend from foe, the Battalion Commander Sam Wild and three others were captured—but smashed their way through, their captors, one of them using a tin of corned beef as a weapon. The Battalion retired through Caspe, taking up every position into which they were ordered and holding it until ordered to move. For this operation Sam Wild was promoted to the rank of Captain.

On March 31st, 1938, the Battalion, marching through Calaceite on its way to the front, marched into an enemy ambush. A fierce struggle ensued in which they put several enemy tanks out of action. But 140 men were taken prisoner that morning and subsequently interned in Borgos and and Palencia. Among those captured was the Commissar of the Battalion, Walter Tapsell of the *Daily Worker*, who was never seen again, having been shot by the fascists.

During the next three months, between fighting shorter actions in mountainous country (where on one occasion for 12 hours they prevented a fascist column two kilometers long from moving down the road, giving the Republican forces time to blow up a bridge in the way of the enemy advance) the Battalion was regrouping, reorganising and preparing for the Ebro offensive, the brilliant action under the Communist military leaders Enrique Lister and Juan Modesto. At midnight on

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July 22nd, the Battalion received its long-awaited orders for what was to be its last battle—the crossing of the Ebro.

"Shock Battalion"

The 15th Brigade crossed at Mora del Ebro; first Battalion to cross was the Canadian; they had been preceded by Spanish troops from other Brigades who had mopped up all the initial resistance. The British followed the Canadians, some in boats and some on the first pontoon bridge. They advanced quickly across country in the direction of Corbera and by late afternoon were outside the town and attacking the hills on its left which were occupied by Moors. In an all-night battle the Moors were driven off, and the 13th Brigade was enabled to advance and occupy Corbera.

It was the fight against the key hill protecting Gandesa that the British fought their toughest action in this campaign and won the title of "Shock Battalion". This high fortified hill, known as Hill 481, resisted all attacks. Supported on different occasions by their Canadian and American comrades, and by Spanish comrades under Lister, the British and Irish attacked the hill for five successive days. On August 1st, they flung themselves into their final and most furious assault, which lasted twelve continuous hours. At one time the leading men were within 20 metres from the fascist positions, but were driven back by three-way fire from the hilltop, from Gandesa and from a valley on the right flank. At 10 o'clock that night they were ordered to stop, though they were preparing and prepared—for yet another attempt.

On the night of August 6th, after thirteen days' continuous action, the Battalion went into reserve. Eight days later it went back into the line and fought in defence of the famous Hill 666 in the Sierra Pandols. It was here that Sam Wild was wounded in the hand. He refused to leave the line. For his leadership in the Ebro battle he was awarded the Medal of Valour and, before his departure from Spain, was raised to the rank of Major.

On August 26th, the Battalion went into rest, but was back in the line on September 6th, acting as shock troops. On September 22nd, the 15th Brigade was ordered to relieve the 13th and move into action. By this time, it was known that the Republican Government, in order to put an end to the interminable shilly-shallying in the League of Nations about "foreign troops on both sides"—the 300,000 conscripts and mercenaries fighting for Franco being equated with the 35,000 international volunteers—had decided to withdraw the International Brigades. The Battalion's last fight on the Ebro was as fierce as its first at Jarama. On September 23rd, after a day's bitter fighting, they crossed the Ebro once more—to take leave of their comrades of the Spanish People's Army and prepare for their return to England. Their ranks were again sadly depleted. Harry Dobson, Lewis Clive, David Guest, Morris Miller, Jack Nalty, Liam McGregor—all leading commanders or commisars—were among those who had fallen in the last battle.

Those remaining took part in the unforgettable last parade of the International Brigades in Barcelona where Dolores Ibárruri (Pasionaria) bidding them farewell in the name of her countrymen and women, told them:

> "Comrades of the International Brigades! Reasons of State, political reasons, the welfare of that same cause for which you offered your blood with boundless generosity, are sending you back, some of you to your own countries and others to forced exile. You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend. You are the heroic example of democracy's solidarity and universality. We shall not forget you, and when the olive tree of peace puts forth its leaves again, mingles with the laurels of the Spanish Republic's victory—come back!"

Owing to difficulties caused by the hostile attitude of the French and British Governments, the British Battalion did not get back to England until December 7th, 1938. They were received at Victoria Station by a vast, cheering, weeping crowd which completely dislocated the traffic and broke through the police cordon that was trying to control the situation. Welcoming speeches were made by Clement Attlee, Sir Stafford Cripps, Tom Mann, Willie Gallacher and Will Lawther, President of the Mineworkers' Federation.

Heads High

There can still be found today a handful of "sour" ones, darlings of the capitalist press and the "objective" sensational-history writers who will parade their disillusionment, recite the grievances embroider on the often real mistakes, hardships and injustices of their period as volunteers for Spanish liberty. But most of those who were privileged to fight alongside the Spanish people hold their heads high. There were no laurels to rest on, and they have not rested. Yet they still feel that for at least a brief moment in their lives they were marching straight along the high road of history, giving all they had for a cause that has remained untarnished to this day.

And that they had this opportunity, that they spent their young manhood in a situation and a climate where there was a clear choice—as Harry Pollitt put it, "democracy and peace, or fascism and war"—is due first and foremost to the glorious Spanish people, and them to our Party, which made possible their contribution to the "cause of all advanced and progressive mankind."

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